UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

FRANCIS J. McCONNELL

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UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

BY
FRANCIS J. McCONNELL
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FOREWORD

THE Mendenhall Lectures, founded by Rev. Marmaduke H. Mendenhall, D.D., of the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, are delivered annually in De Pauw University to the public without any charge for admission. The object of the donor was "to found a perpetual lectureship on the evidences of the Divine Origin of Christianity and the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures. The lecturers must be persons of high and wide repute, of broad and varied scholarship, who firmly adhere to the evangelical system of Christian faith. The selection of lecturers may be made from the world of Christian scholarship, without regard to denominational divisions. Each course of lectures is to be published in book form by an eminent publishing house and sold at cost to the faculty and students of the University."

Lectures previously published: 1913, The Bible and Life, Edwin Holt Hughes; 1914, The Literary Primacy of the Bible, George Peck Eckman.

GEORGE R. GROSE,
President De Pauw University.

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

THE problem as to the understanding of the Scriptures is with some no problem at all. All we have to do is to take the narratives at their face meaning. The Book is written in plain English, and all that is necessary for its comprehension is a knowledge of what the words mean. If we have any doubts, we can consult the dictionary. The plain man ought to have no difficulty in understanding the Bible.

Nobody can deny the clearness of the English of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the plain man does have trouble. How far would the ordinary intelligence have to read from the first chapter of Genesis before finding itself in difficulties? There are accounts of events utterly unlike anything which we see happening in the life around us, events which seem to us to contradict the course of nature's procedure. There are points of view

foreign to our way of looking at things. More than that, there seem to be actual contradictions between various portions of the books. And, above all, the way of life marked out in the Book seems to lead off toward mystery. To save our lives we have to lose them. All the precepts of common sense seem set at defiance by some passages of the Book. How can we explain the hold of such a book on the world's life?

When once the problem of the understanding of the Scriptures is raised, various solutions are offered, all of which contribute a measure of help, but most of which do not greatly get us ahead. For example, we are told that the Book is translated literature, and that if we could get back to the original narratives in the original languages, we would find our perplexities vanishing. There is no question that a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew does aid us in an understanding of the Scriptures, but this aid commonly extends only to the meaning of particular words. One who knows enough of Greek or Hebrew to enter sympathetically into the life of which those lan-

guages were the expression is prepared to sense the scriptural atmosphere better than one who has not such equipment. Very few Scripture readers, however, are thus qualified to understand Greek and Hebrew. Very few ministers of the gospel are so trained as to be able to pass upon shades of meaning of Greek or Hebrew words against the judgment of those who teach these languages in the schools. With graduation from theological school most ministers put Hebrew to one side; and many pay no further attention to Greek. Even a trained biblical student is very careful not to question the authority of the professional linguistic experts. Apart from sidelights upon the meaning of this or that passage, there is very little that the biblical student can get from Greek or Hebrew which is not available in important translations. We cannot solve the greater difficulties in biblical study by carrying our investigations back to the study of the original languages as such. The fact is that emphasis upon the importance of mastery of Greek and Hebrew for an insight into scriptural meanings rests largely

upon a theory of literal inspiration of the biblical narratives. It requires only a cursory reading to see that the narratives in English cannot claim to be strictly inerrant, so that the upholder of inerrancy is driven to the position that the inerrancy is in the documents as originally written. No doctrine of inerrancy, however, can explain away the puzzles which confront us, for example, in the accounts of the creation as given us in the early chapters of Genesis, or throw light upon the possibility of a soul's passing from moral death to life.

Great help is promised us by those who maintain that the modern methods of critical biblical study give us the key to scriptural meanings. There is no doubt that many doors have been opened by critical methods. Now that the flurries of misunderstanding which attended the first application of such methods to biblical study have passed on, we see that some solid results have been gained. In so far as our difficulties arise from questions of authorship and date of writing, the critical methods have brought much relief.

Even very orthodox biblicists no longer insist that it is necessary to oppose the teaching that the first five books of the Bible were written at different times and by different men. In fact, there is no reason to quarrel with the theory that many parts of these books are not merely anonymous, but are documents produced by the united effort of narrators and correlators reaching through generations—the narratives often being transmitted orally from fathers to sons. There is no reason for longer arguing against the claim that the book of Isaiah as it stands in our Scriptures is composed of documents written at widely separated periods. It is permissible even from the standpoint of orthodoxy to assign a late date to the book of Daniel. No harm is wrought when we insist that the book of Mark must have priority in date among the Gospels, and that Matthew and Luke are built in part from Mark as a foundation. It is not dangerous to face the facts which cause the prolonged debate over the authorship of the fourth Gospel. It is not heresy to teach that the dates of the epistles must be rearranged through the findings

of modern scholarship. There is not only no danger in a hospitable attitude toward modern scholarship, but many difficulties disappear through adjusting ourselves to present-day methods. If contradictions appear in a document hitherto considered a unit, the contradictions are at least measurably done away with when the document is seen to be a composite report from the points of view of different authors. The critical method has been of immense value in enforcing upon us that the scriptural books were written each with a distinctive intention, apart from the purpose to represent the facts in the method of a newspaper reporter or of a scientific investigator. In a sense many of the more important scriptural documents were of the nature of pamphlets or tracts for the times in which they were written. The author was combating a heresy, or supplementing a previous statement which seemed to him to be inadequate, or seeking to adjust a religious conception to enlarging demands. The biblical writers are commentators on or interpreters of the truth which they conceive to be essential.

Making most generous allowances, however, for the advantages of the critical methods, we must use them with considerable care. Results like those suggested above seem to be well established, but there is always possibility of the critic's becoming a mere specialist with the purely technical point of view. Suppose the critic holds so to the passion for analysis that for him analysis becomes everything. We may then have a single verse cut into three or four pieces, each assigned to a different author, the authors separated by long periods. Even if the older narratives are composite, the process of welding or compression was so thorough that detailed analyses are now out of the question. Apart from its broader contentions, the method of the critical school must be used tentatively and without dogmatism. Moreover, we must always remember that the critical student comes to his task with assumptions which are oftentimes more potent with him from his very blindness to their existence. Assumption in scientific investigation is inevitable. Suppose a critic to be markedly under the influence of some evolutionary hypothesis.

Suppose him to believe that the formula which makes progress a movement from the simple to the complex can be traced in detail in the advance of society. He is prepared to believe that in practically every case the simple has preceded the complex. He will forthwith untangle the biblical narrative to get at the ideal evolutionary arrangement, ignoring the truth that except in the most general fashion progress cannot thus be traced. In the actual life of societies the progress, especially of ideas, is often from the complex to the simple. Many evolutionists maintain that movement is now forward, now backward, now diagonal, and now by a "short cut"; but if the evolutionary critic sticks closely to his preconceived formula about progress as always from the simple to the complex, he can lead us astray. Again, almost all great prophetic announcements are ahead of their time. They seem out of place at the date of their first utterance—interruptions, interjections hard to fit into an orderly historic scheme. Or suppose the critic to be a student of the scientific school which will not allow for the play of any

forces excepting as they openly reveal themselves, the school that will not allow for backgrounds of thought or for atmospheres which surround conceptions. Such a student is very apt to maintain, for example, that Paul knew only so much of the life of Jesus as he mentions in the epistles. Such a student cannot assume that Paul ever took anything for granted. We can see at once that a method so professedly exact as this may be dangerously out of touch with the human processes of the life of individuals and of societies. Or suppose still further that the biblical student holds a set of scientific assumptions which are extremely naturalistic; that is to say, suppose that he assumes that nothing has ever happened which in any way departs from the natural order. We have only to remind ourselves that the natural order of a particular time is the order as that time conceives it; but it is manifestly hazardous to limit events in the world of matter to the scientific conceptions of any one day. To take a single illustration, the radical student of the life of Jesus of a generation ago cast out forthwith from the Gospel accounts

everything which suggested the miraculous. The conceptions of the order of nature which obtained a generation ago did not allow even for works of healing of the sort recorded in the Gospels. At the present time radical biblical criticism makes considerable allowance for such works. Discovery of the power of mental suggestion and of the influence of mind over body has opened the door to the return of some of the wonders wrought by Jesus to a place among historic facts. This does not mean that the radical student is any more friendly to miracles than before. We are not here raising the question of miracles as such, but we do insist that an assumption as to what the natural order may or may not allow can be fraught with peril in the hands of critical students of the Scriptures. We say again that while, in general, the larger contentions of the biblical school can be looked upon as established beyond reasonable doubt; and while, in general, the methods of the school are productive of good, yet, because of the part that assumption plays in the fashioning of all critical tools, the assumptions must be scrutinized with all pos-

sible care. A good practical rule is to read widely from the critics, to accept what they generally agree upon, to hold very loosely anything that seems "striking" or "brilliant." This is a field in which originality must be discounted. There is so little check upon the imagination.

It is but a step from the consideration of the critical methods in biblical study to that of the historical methods in the broader sense. Many students who are out of patience with the more narrowly critical processes maintain that the broader historical methods are of vast value in biblical discussion. Here, again, we must admit the large measure of justice in the claim. We can see at once that the same reservations must be made as in the case of the critical methods. The assumptions play a determining part. If we are on our guard against any tricks that assumptions may play, we can eagerly expect the historical methods to aid us greatly.

We have come to see that any revelation to be really a revelation must speak in the language of a particular time. But speaking in

the language of a particular time implies at the outset very decided limitations. The prophets who arise to proclaim any kind of truth must clothe their ideas in the thought terms of a particular day and can accomplish their aims only as they succeed in leading the spiritual life of their day onward and upward. Such a prophet will accommodate himself to the mental and moral and religious limitations of the time in which he speaks. Only thus can he get a start. It is inevitable, then, that along with the higher truth of his message there will appear the marks of the limitations of the mold in which the message is cast. The prophet must take what materials he finds at hand, and with these materials direct the people to something higher and better. Furthermore, in the successive stages through which the idea grows we must expect to find it affected by all the important factors which in any degree determine its unfolding. The first stage in understanding the Scriptures is to learn what a writer intended to say, what he meant for the people of his day. To do this we must rely upon the methods which we use in

any historical investigation. The Christian student of the Scriptures believes that the Bible contains eternal truths for all time, truths which are above time in their spiritual values. Even so, however, the truth must first be written for a particular time and that time the period in which the prophet lived. When the Christian speaks of the Scriptures as containing a revelation for all time, he refers to their essential spiritual value. The best way to make that essential spiritual value effective for the after times is to sink it deep into the consciousness of a particular time. This gives it leverage, or focus for the outworking of its forces. No matter how limited the conceptions in which the spiritual richness first took form, those conceptions can be understood by the students who look back through the ages, while the spiritual value itself shines out with perennial freshness. Paradoxical as it may sound, the truths which are of most value for all time are those which first get themselves most thoroughly into the thought and feeling of some one particular time.

Let us look at the opening chapters of

Genesis for illustration. The historical student points out to us that the science of the first chapters of Genesis is not peculiar to the Hebrew people, that substantially similar views of the stages through which creation moved are to be found in the literatures of surrounding peoples. A well-known type of student would therefore seek at one stroke to bring the first chapters of Genesis down to the level of the scriptures of the neighbors of the Hebrews. He would then discount all these narratives alike by reference to modern astronomy, geology, and biology. But the difference between the Hebrew account and the other accounts lies in this, that in the Hebrew statement the science of a particular time is made the vehicle of eternally superb moral and spiritual conceptions concerning man and concerning man's relation to the Power that brought him into being. The worth of these conceptions even in that early statement few of us would be inclined to question. Assuming that any man or set of men became in the old days alive to the value of such religious ideas, how could they speak them forth except in the language of their

own day? They had to speak in their own tongue, and speaking in that tongue they had to use the thought terms expressed by that tongue. They accepted the science of their day as true, and they utilized that science for the sake of bodying forth the moral and spiritual insights to which they had attained. The inadequacy of early Hebrew science and its likeness to Babylonian and Chaldean science do not invalidate the worth of the spiritual conceptions of Genesis. This ought to be apparent even to the proverbial wayfaring man. The loftiest spiritual utterances are often clad in the poorest scientific draperies. Who would dare deny the worth of the great moral insights of Dante? And who, on the other hand, would insist upon the lasting value of the science in which his deep penetrations are uttered? And so with Milton. Dr. W. F. Warren has shown the nature of the material universe as pictured in Milton's "Paradise Lost." In passing from heaven to hell one would descend from an upper to a lower region of a sphere, passing through openings at the centers of other concentric spheres on the way

down. Nothing more foreign to modern science can be imagined; yet we do not cast aside "Paradise Lost" because of the crudity of its view of the physical system.

Assuming that the biblical prophets were to have any effect whatever, in what language could they speak except that of their own time? Their position was very similar to that of the modern preacher who uses present-day ideas of the physical universe as instruments to proclaim moral and spiritual values. Nobody can claim that modern scientific theories are ultimate, and nobody can deny, on the other hand, that vast good is done in the utilization of these conceptions for high religious purposes.

A minister once sought in a sermon on the marvels of man's constitution to enforce his conceptions by speaking of the instantaneousness with which a message flashed to the brain through the nervous system is heeded and acted upon. He said that the touch of red-hot iron upon a finger tip makes a disturbance which is instantly reported to the brain for action. A scientific hearer was infinitely disgusted. He said that all such distur-

bances are acted upon in the spinal cord. He could see no value, therefore, even in the main point of the minister's sermon because of the minister's mistaken conception of nervous processes. I suppose very few of us know whether this scientific objection was well taken or not. Very few of us, however, would reject the entire sermon because of an erroneous illustration; and yet sometimes all the essentials of the Scriptures are discounted because of flaws no more consequential than that suggested in this illustration.

The Scriptures aim to declare a certain idea of God, a certain idea of man, and a certain idea of the relations between God and man. Those ideas are clothed in the garments of successive ages. The change in the fashions and adequacy of the garments does not make worthless the living truth which the garments clothe. Jesus himself lived deeply in his own time and spoke his own language and worked through the thought terms which were part of the life of his time. Some biblical readers have been greatly disturbed in recent years by the discovery of the part which so-called apocalyptic thought-forms

play in the teaching of Jesus. The fact is that these conceptions were the commonest element in all later Jewish thinking. Jesus could not have lived when he did without making apocalyptic terms the vehicle for his doctrines. We have come to see that the manner of the coming of the kingdom of Jesus is not so important as the character of that kingdom.

Not only must a prophet speak in the language of a definite time, but he must speak to men as he finds them. This being so, we must expect that revelations will in a sense be accommodated to the apprehension of the day of their utterance. The minds of men are in constant movement. If the prophet were to have before him minds altogether at a standstill, he might well despair of accomplishing great results by his message. He would be forced to think of the intelligence of this day as a sort of vessel which he could fill with so much and no more. But whether the prophets have through the ages had any theoretic understanding of human intelligence as an organism or not, they have acted upon the assumption that they were dealing

with such organisms. So they have conceived of their truth as a seed cast into the ground, passing through successive stages. Jesus himself spoke of the kingdom of God as moving out of the stage of the blade into that of the ear and finally into that of the full corn in the ear. This illustration is our warrant for insisting that in the enforcing of truth all manner of factors come into play and that the truth passes through successive epochs, some of which may seem to later believers very unpromising and unworthy. The test of the worth of an idea is not so much any opinion as to the unseemliness of the stages through which it has passed as it is the value of the idea when once it has come to ripeness. The test of the grain is its final value for food. The scriptural truths are to be judged by no other test than that of their worth for life.

In the light of the teaching of Jesus himself there is no reason why we should shrink from stating that the revelation of biblical truth is influenced by even the moral limitations of men. Jesus said that an important revelation to man was halted at an imperfect

stage because of the hardness of men's hearts. The Mosaic law of divorce was looked upon by Jesus as inadequate. The law represented the best that could be done with hardened hearts. The author of the Practice of Christianity, a book published anonymously some years ago, has shown conclusively how the hardness of men's hearts limits any sort of moral and spiritual revelation. It will be remembered that William James in discussing the openness of minds to truth divided men into the "tough-minded" and the "tender-minded." James was not thinking of moral distinctions: he was merely emphasizing the fact that tough-minded men require a different order of intellectual approach than do the tender-minded. If we put into tough-mindedness the element of moral hardness and unresponsiveness which the prophet must meet, we can see how such an element would condition and limit the prophet.

Again, Jesus said to his disciples that he had many things to say to them, but that they could not bear them at the time at which he spoke. Some revelations must wait for moral strength on the part of the people to whom

they are to come. Suppose, for example, in this year of our Lord 1917, some scientist should discover a method of touching off explosives from a great distance by wireless telegraphy without the need of a specially prepared receiver at the end where the explosion is desired. Suppose it were possible for him simply to press a button and blow up all the ships of the British Navy, or all the stores of munitions in Germany. What would be the first duty of such an inventor? Very likely it would be his immediate duty to keep the secret closely locked in his own mind. If such a discovery were made known to European combatants in their present temper, it is a question what would be left on earth at the end of the next twenty-four hours. With European minds in their present moral and spiritual plight it would not be safe to trust them with any such revelation. And this illustration has significance for more than the physical order of revelation. There are principles for individual and social conduct that may well be put into effect one hundred years from now. Men are not now morally fit to receive some revelations. All of which

means that any revealing movement is a progressive movement in that it depends upon not merely the utterances of the revealing mind, but upon the response of the receiving mind. In the play back and forth between giver and receiver all sorts of factors come into power. The study of the interplay of these factors is entirely worthy as an object of Christian research. We may well be thankful for any advance thus far made in such study and we may look for greater advances in the future. For example, the historic students thus far have put in most of their effort laying stress upon similarities between the biblical conceptions and the conceptions of the peoples outside the current of biblical revelation. The work has been of great value. Nevertheless it would seem to be about time for larger emphasis on the differences between the biblical revelations and the conceptions outside.

Still when all is said the mastery of historical methods of study is but preliminary to the real understanding of the Scriptures. If we come close to the revealing movement itself, we find that before we get far into the

stream there must be sympathetic responsiveness to biblical teaching. The difficulties in understanding the Scriptures are, as of old, not so much of the intellect as they are of conscience and will—the difficulties, in a word, that arise from the hardness of men's hearts.

CHAPTER II

THE BOOK OF LIFE

The approaches to an understanding of the Scriptures which we suggested in the first chapter are those which have to do merely with intellectual investigation. Any student with normal intelligence can appreciate the methods and results of the critical scrutiny of the biblical documents, but will require something more for an adequate mastery of the scriptural revelations. There is need of sympathetic realization that the Book itself did not in any large degree come out of the exercise of the merely intellectual faculties. In the scriptural revelation we are dealing with a current of life which flowed for centuries through the minds of masses of people. To be sure of insight into the meanings of this revelation there must be an approach to the Bible as a Book of Life in the sense that its teachings came out of life and that they were perennially used to play back into life. Its hold on life to-day can be ex-

plained only by the fact that it was thus born out of life, and has its chief significance for the experiences of actual life.

Even the most superficial perusal of the Scriptures shows that they came of practical contact with men and things. There is comparatively little in the entire content of our Sacred Book to suggest the speculations of abstract philosophy. The writers deal with the concrete. They tell of men and of peoples who had to face facts and who achieved comprehensions and convictions through grappling with facts. There is about the Scriptures what some one has called a sort of "out-of-doors-ness." There is very little hint of withdrawal from the push and pressure of daily living. If the prophets ever withdrew to solitude, they did not retire to closets, but rather to deserts or to mountains. We must not allow our modern familiarity with book-making as an affair of library research and tranquil meditation in seclusion to mislead us into thinking that the Christian Bible was wrought out in similar fashion. The Book is full of the tingle and even the roar of the life out of which it was born. Jesus gathered up

in a single sentence the process by which the scriptural revelation can be apprehended by man when he said, "He that doeth the will shall know of the truth." The entire scriptural unfolding is one vast commentary on this utterance of Jesus.

It is impossible for us in this series of studies to attempt any detailed survey of the revealing movement of which our Scriptures are the outcome. It is important, however, that we should see clearly that the revelation came to those who opened themselves to the light in an obedient spirit. While it is not in accord with our modern knowledge of psychology to assort and divide human activities too sharply, it is nevertheless permissible to insist that the biblical revelation was in a sense primarily to the will. As Frederick W. Robertson used to say, obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge. The first men to whom illuminations came evidently received these gifts out of some purity of intention and moral excellence. These early leaders gathered others around them and set them on the path of determined striving toward a definite goal. As the idea of the

seer or the prophet found general acceptance it gradually hardened into law, law meant for scrupulous observance. If a singer felt stirred to write a psalm, he voiced his experiences or his aspirations in the midst of a throbbing world. If a statesman drew a wide survey of God's dealings with the nations of the earth, he did so at some mighty crisis in Israel's relations to Egypt or Assyria or Babylon. When we reach New Testament times we find that even the Gospels seem to have been books struck out of immediate practical urgencies rather than composed tranquilly with a scholar's interest merely in doing a fine piece of professional work. The early Christians were anxious to hold the believers to the strait and narrow way. To do this they repeated often the words of the Lord Jesus. When, however, the older members of the first circles began to fall away, the words were written down, not because some scholar felt moved thus to improve his leisure, but because it was absolutely necessary to preserve the words. Moreover, conflicts were arising between the growing church and the forces of the world

round about. Some scriptures were written to supply instruments with which to carry on the warfare. Always the fundamental aim was to keep the people acting according to the teachings which lay at the heart of the Christian system. The object of the biblical revelation was from the beginning just what it is to-day in the hands of Christian believers—the object of using the Scriptures as an instrument for practicing the Christian spirit into all the phases of life.

We would by no means deny that there are imposing philosophies or, rather, hints toward such philosophies, in the Scriptures, but we insist that these did not come out of a purely philosophizing temper. They came as men tried to put into some form or order the understandings at which they had arrived as they wrestled with the tough facts of a world which they were trying to subject to the rule of their religion. As we have said in the previous chapter, the Scriptures bear scars of all such conflicts. The revelation was knocked into its shape in the rough-and-tumble of an attempt to convert the world.

And this is not to claim for the Bible any difference in method of creation from that which obtains in the shaping of any vitally effective piece of literature. The world-shaking conceptions have always been won in profound experience. This chapter is not written with the principles of the modern school of pragmatism as a guide, and yet pragmatism can be so stated as to phrase an essentially Christian doctrine that spiritual ideas result from spiritual practices and are of worth as they prove themselves aids in further experience. Take some of the expressions of Paul. The fundamental fact in Paul's experience was his vision on the Damascus road and his determination to be obedient to that vision. To make his own view of the Christian religion attractive to those whom he was trying to win, it became necessary for him to speak in terms of the Judaism of his time. In fact, he could not have spoken in any other terms, though some of his reasonings seem to us to be remote from actual life. But when he left argument and came back to experience he was most effective. His terribly compelling ut-

terances are those which were born of driving necessity. The theology started with the vision and unfolded in obedience to the vision, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Everywhere upon Paul's epistles there are the marks of practical compulsion. A letter was dispatched to convince stubborn Jews in Galatia or to persuade questioning Gentiles in Rome. Some of the profoundest phrasings of Pauline belief were uttered first as appeals for generous collections to starving saints.

The example of Paul as a receiver and giver of spiritual light is very significant. Even if we should make the largest allowances to the biblical critics who would cut down the number of epistles known to be genuinely Pauline, we would have enough left to make on our minds the impression of enormous personal activity. One passage does, indeed, tell us of a period of months of withdrawal for reflection in Arabia. For the most part, however, Paul's life was spent in ceaselessly going to and fro throughout the Roman empire; even in the days of imprisonment he seems to have been burdened with

the administration of churches. It was out of such multifarious activities that the theology of Paul was born, and therein lies its value. No interpretation is likely to bring the separate deliverances into anything like formal, logical consistency. Very likely Paul was of a markedly logical frame of mind, but he did not attempt to rid his message of contradictions in detail. The unity and consistency are found in the fundamental life purpose to get men to accept Jesus Christ as the Chosen of God. If Paul had ever heard that much of his theology might be out-dated with the passage of the years, he would probably have responded that he was perfectly willing that the instrument should be cast aside if it had served its spiritual purpose of bringing men to obedience to the law of God.

It is not intended to make this a book of sermons or exhortations. We must say, however, that in a series of studies on how to understand the Scriptures stress must be laid upon the maxim that the Scriptures can be understood only by those who seek to recognize and obey the spirit of life breathing forth

from the Scriptures. Nothing could be more hopeless than to attempt to get to the heart of Christian truth without attempting to build that truth into life. The formal reasonings of the theologian are no doubt of value, but they throw little light upon the essentials of Christianity except as they deal with data which have been supplied by Christian experience. It would, indeed, be well for any study of the Bible to begin with a recognition of the part played by distinctly scholarly research. We cannot go far, however, until we recognize that sympathy with Christian truth is necessary before we can come upon vital knowledge. And this, after all, is but the way we learn to understand any piece of life-literature. A vast amount of material is at hand in the form of commentaries upon the work of Shakespeare. We know much about the circumstances under which the plays of Shakespeare were written; we know somewhat of the sources from which Shakespeare drew his historical materials; we are familiar with the chronology of the plays; but all this is knowledge about Shakespeare. To know Shakespeare there

must be something of a deliberate attempt to surrender sympathetically to the Shakespearean point of view. We get "inside of" any classic work of literature only by this spirit of surrender. The aim of Shakespeare is simply to picture life as he sees it, but even to appreciate the picture men must enter into sympathy with the painter. The Scriptures aim not merely to paint life, but to quicken and reproduce life. How much more, then, is needed a surrender of the will before there can be adequate appreciation of the Scriptures? If the Scriptures are the results primarily of will-activities, how can they finally be mastered except by minds quickened by doing the will revealed in the Scriptures? The book of Christianity must be interpreted by the disciples of Christianity. Judged merely by bookish standards, there is no satisfactory explanation of the power of the Bible. But lift the whole problem out of the realm of books as such! The glimpses into any high truth that are worth while—how do they come? They come out of experience. Even when they are repeated from one mind to another they become the

property of that second mind only as they reproduce themselves in experience. Otherwise the whole transaction is of words, words, words. The Scriptures have to do with deeds, not words.

All this is offensive to the dogmatic reasoner. For him the intellect as such is the organ of religious truth. He insists on speaking of the Scriptures in formally theological terms. That the Scripture writers employed theological terms there can be no doubt, but they did not speak as systematic theologians. And always they brought their theology to the test of actual life. The writer of these lines once knew a student who had read enough of psychology to enable him to reason himself into a belief that he was the only person in existence; that is to say, he declared that he himself was the only one of whose existence he was infallibly certain. Does not all knowledge of an external world come as a report through a sensation aroused by stimulus? If the appropriate stimulus could be kept up an external world might fall away and I would still think it was there. The bell might ring at the door and there

might be nobody there. And so on and on, through steps familiar enough to the student of philosophy. When a friend made a quick appeal to life with the question: "If you are the only one alive, why do you bring your troubles to me?" the amateur philosopher came to earth with a sense of jar. But the jar is no greater than that when we pass from the plane of dogmatic theology to that of reading the Scriptures for their own sake. The old scholastics said that in God there are three substances, one essence, and two processions. How does this sound as compared with the statement of Jesus that he and his Father are one, and that he would send the Comforter? This is not to decry theology; but is nevertheless to discriminate between theology and scripture.

Some one will object, however, that the scriptural truths take their start in large part from the visions of mystics—of men who brood long and patiently until they behold realities not otherwise discernible. Some students will urge upon us that such mystic revelations are granted peculiarly to the mystic temperament as such, and that

they often come regardless of the quality of life that the seers themselves may be living.

There have, indeed, been in all ages of the world temperaments of supernormal or abnormal responsiveness to influences which seem to make little or no impression upon the ordinary mind. In all periods natures of this type have been looked upon as organs of religious revelation. So valuable have abnormal experiences seemed that all manner of expedients have been utilized to beget unusual mental states. A certain tribe of Indians, for example, in the southwest of our country are accustomed at set times to send their religious leaders into the desert to find and partake of a peculiar plant which has an opiate or narcotic effect. In the belief of the Indians this plant opens the door to visions. The visions, as reported by those who have recovered from the influence of the narcotic, are not of any considerable value. Similar attempts have been made by hypnotic experimenters among other peoples, the hypnosis sometimes being self-induced. From some Old Testament passages especially we may

well believe that this sort of extraordinary mental condition was sought for in the so-called schools of the prophets in the olden days of Israel. The astonishing peculiarity about the Scriptures, however, is not that there is so much reliance on this trance experience as that there is so little. The Hebrew Scriptures were the expression of a people living in the midst of heathen surroundings; and heathenism always has laid stress upon the virtue of these abnormal experiences. Granting all allowances for mental states induced by eating an opiate, or by whirling like the dervish, or by fasting like the Hindu, the fact remains that in the main, the visions of the writers of our Scriptures came out of attempts to realize in conduct the moral will of God. When we think of the surroundings even of the early church; when we reflect upon the force of suggestion for uncritical minds; when we consider the sway of superstition at all periods during the Hebrew revealing movement, the wonder is that the Scriptures lay such stress as they do upon the type of vision which arises from faithfulness in doing the revealed will.

If we may characterize scriptural mysticism, it seems very much akin to mental abilities which we meet frequently in our ordinary intercourse. Take, for example, the prescience of a skilled business man. Nothing is more inadequate than the rules for success laid down by many a man who has himself succeeded in business. Mastery of his rules will not help another to win business success. The reason is that there comes out of prolonged business practice a keen sense of what is likely to happen in the industrial or financial world. The sharpened wits foresee without being able to assign reasons or grounds for the prophecies. So it is with intellects trained to any superior skill. The Duke of Wellington once remarked that he had spent all his life wondering what was on the other side of the hills in front of him, yet the Duke himself came to marvelous skill in guessing what was on the other side. There is also a variety of scientific mysticism, if such an expression may be permitted. The man long trained to the reading of scientific processes develops a quick insight which runs far ahead of reason

or proof. The transcendent scientific discoveries have been glimpsed or, rather, sensed before they so reported themselves that they could be seized by formal proof. Now it is a far cry from business men, generals, and scientists to the mysticism of the Scriptures, but when we see the emphasis which the Scriptures place upon constancy in keeping the law and in acting according to divine commandments, we cannot help feeling that biblical mysticism was and is an awareness developed as the life becomes practiced to the doing of religious duty. Think too of the emphasis placed in the Scriptures upon the consecration of the whole life to the truth as cleansing the heart from evil. All this makes for a power to seize truth beyond that possible to formal and systematic reason. Mysticism of this sort is the very height of spiritual power. The Master's word: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," does not refer to merely negative virtue. It means also the power of soul accumulated in the positive doing of good. It means entrance into the life of quick spiritual awareness through the

adjustment of the whole nature to the single moral purpose.

In all promise of revelation the Scriptures insist upon the importance of keeping upon the basis of solid obedience. The finer the instrument is to be, the more massive must be the foundation. Professor Hocking, of Harvard University, has used a remarkable illustration to enforce this very conception. The scientific instrument, he says, which must be kept freest from distracting influences so that it may make the finest registries must rest upon a foundation broad and deep. So the soul that is to catch the finest stirrings of the divine must rest upon the solidest stones of hard work for the moral purposes of the scriptural Kingdom.

Still some one will insist that the Bible is a book built around great crises in human experience; that it is a record of these crises; that the people in whose history the crises occurred were a peculiar people, apparently arbitrarily chosen as a medium for religious world-instruction; that the crises cast sudden bursts of intense light upon the meaning of human life, but that they themselves are

far apart from ordinary experience. Here, again, we must insist that the scriptural stress is always upon obedience to what is conceived of as revealed truth. We have already said that Jesus regarded revelation as organic. In everything organic we find instances of quick crisis following long and slow periods of growth. The crisis or the climax of the sudden flowering-out would never be possible were it not for the antecedent growth. The Hebrew nation, developed through workaday righteousness, manifested wonderful power in sudden crises. The inner forces of moral purpose which at times seemed hidden or dead because of the riot of wickedness suddenly blossomed forth in mighty bursts of prophecy; but the all-essential was the long-continued practice of righteousness which made possible the sudden crisis; and this is in keeping with the teachings of most commonplace human experience. The daily struggle prepares for the sharp, quick strain or for the swift unfolding of a new moral purpose. There is nothing more arbitrary in the crises in the scriptural movement than in the ordinary ongoings of

our lives. The student who has long been wrestling with a problem finds the solution instantaneously bursting upon him in the midst of untoward circumstances. The most insignificant trifle may finally turn the lock which opens to the glorious revelation after prolonged brooding. The daily practice may make men ready for the shock which leaps upon them altogether unexpected.

We summarize by saying that the essentials of biblical truth came in progressive revelations to men who were putting forth their energies to live up to the largest ideals they could reach; and that they sought these larger ideals for use in their lives. It must be understood in all that we have said about acting the revelation out into life that we do not mean merely the more matter-of-fact activities. It should be noticed that whenever men speak of will-activities they are apt to give the impression that they mean some putting forth of bodily energy. The will to do scriptural righteousness did not manifest itself merely in outside actions. It manifested itself just as thoroughly in bearings and attitudes of the inner spirit; and the

appeal was always to the will to hold itself fast in the direction of the highest life, whatever the form of the activity.

After this emphasis upon obedience as the organ of spiritual knowledge some one may ask what provision we are making for infallibility and for inspiration. We can only say that we are dealing with a Book which has come out of concrete life, and that in concrete life not much consideration is given to abstract infallibility. In daily experience the righteous soul becomes increasingly sure of itself. To return for the moment to Paul, we may think of the certainty with which he grasped the thought of the reward which would be his. The time of his departure, or, of his unmooring, was at hand. He was perfectly confident that he was to go on longer voyages of spiritual discovery and exploration. Can we say that this splendid outburst came from devotion to an abstract formula? Did it not, rather, spring from the sources of life within him—sources opened and developed by the experiences through which he passed? The biblical heroes wrought and suffered through living

confidence in the forces which were bearing them on and up. They would have answered questions about abstract infallibility with emphatic avowals as to the firmness of their own belief. In other words, they could have relied upon their life itself as its own best witness to itself. They felt alive and ready to go whithersoever life might lead.

And so with inspiration. It is the merest commonplace to repeat that the inspiration of the Scriptures must show itself in their power to inspire those who partake of their life. Does a fresh moral and spiritual air blow through them? Is there in them anything that men can breathe? Anything upon which men can build themselves into moral strength? This is the final test of inspiration. Physical breathing is in itself a mystery, but we know when the air invigorates us. Abstract doctrine of inspiration apart from life and experience is a very stifling affair compared with inspiration conceived of as a breath of life. The scriptural doctrine is that the man who does the will finds himself able to breathe more deeply of the truth of God; and that the very breath itself will

satisfy him, and by satisfying him convince him that it is the breath of life.

There is an old story of a student who decided to learn the meaning of a strange religion which was taught and practiced by priests in a far-away corner of India. The student thought to disguise himself, to go close to the doors of the temple and to listen there for what he might overhear of the principles taught by the priests. One day he was detected and captured by the priests and made their slave. He was set to work performing to the utmost the duties for which the temple called. His response was at first rebellious. In the long years that followed the spell of the strange religion was cast upon him. He began to learn not as an outsider, not as one merely studying writings and rituals, but as one enthralled by the system itself. In this old story, inadequate as it is, we have a suggestion of the way in which the biblical revelation lays its spell upon man. The outside study is, indeed, worth much, but the true understanding comes inside the temple to him who carries forward the work of the temple.

CHAPTER III

THE BOOK OF HUMANITY

We have seen that the understanding of the Scriptures presupposes at least a sympathy with the rule of life contained in the Scriptures, and implies for its largest results a practical surrender to that rule of life. He that doeth the will revealed in the Scriptures cometh to a knowledge of the truth revealed in the Scriptures. We must next note that an understanding of the Bible cannot advance far until it realizes the emphasis on the human values set before us in the scriptural books. We are to approach the distinctively religious teachings of the Bible somewhat later. It is now in order to call attention to the truth that the biblical movement is throughout the ages in the direction of increasing regard for the distinctively human. The human ideal is not so much absolutely stated as imposed in laws, in prophecies, in the policies of statesmen, in the types of ideal erected on high before the chosen people as

worthy of supreme regard. And the place of the human ideal in the Bible helps determine the place of the Bible in human life. Mankind makes much of the Book because the Book makes much of mankind.

There is much obscurity about the beginnings of the laws of the Hebrews. One characteristic of those laws, however, is evident from a very early date—the regard for human life as such and the aim to make human existence increasingly worth while. It is a common quality of primitive religions that they are apt to lay stress on merely ceremonial cleansings, for example. The ceremony is gone through for the sake of pleasing a deity. There are abundant indications of this same purpose in the ceremonies of the early Hebrews, but there is even more abundant indication that the ceremonies were aimed at a good result for the worshiper himself. It is impossible to read through the Mosaic requirements concerning bodily cleanliness, the sanitary arrangements of the camps, the regulations for cooking the food, and the instructions for dealing with disease without feeling that there is a wide difference

between such requirements and merely formal ceremonials. The Mosaic sanitary law aimed at the good of the people. It sought to make men clean and decent and human. So it was also in many of the rules governing the daily work, the regulations as to the use of land, the prohibitions of usury, the relations of servants and masters—all these had back of them the driving force of an enlarging human ideal. The trend was away from everything unhuman and inhuman. It is not necessary for us to remark upon the outbursts of the prophets against those who would put property interests above human interests. It is a matter of commonplace that the call of the prophets was for larger devotion to a genuinely human ideal: that the fires of their wrath burned most fiercely against old-time monopolists who joined land to land till there was "no place," and against old-time corrupters of the law who sold the needy for a pair of shoes.

Not only did the emphasis on the human ideal show in laws, but in the training up of types of life which should in themselves embody and illustrate the conceptions of the

biblical leaders. At the heart of the Christian religion is incarnation, or divine revelation through the human organism. We are told that this incarnation came in the fullness of time. The passage seems to refer not merely to the rounding out of historic periods, but also to the fashioning of an ideal of human character, and at least a partial realization of that ideal in Hebrew heroes. If the final ideal was to stand incarnate before men, there must be approximations to that ideal before the crowning incarnation could be appreciated. We look upon the character of Jesus as the complete embodiment of human excellencies. Such a revelation, however, would have been futile if there had not previously been glimpses of and anticipations of the ideal in the lives of those who were forerunners of Jesus. The Scriptures teach, or at least imply, that the life of a good man is in itself a transcendent value.

And yet it is perfectly clear that while the Scriptures exalt the individual, they do not mean to wall individuals off in impenetrable circles by themselves. It is true that the individual is the end toward which the scriptural

redemption and glorification aims, but individuals find their own best selves not in isolation but in union with their fellows—a union of mutual cooperation and service, a union so close that the persons thus related come to be looked upon as a veritable Body of Christ, making together by their impact upon the world the same sort of revelation that the living Christ made in the days of his early life. The ideals as to the supremacy of human values are realized, according to the Scriptures, not in any separateness of individual existence, but in a closeness of social interdependence. So true is this that it is hardly possible to see how one can make much of the scriptural movement without immersing himself in the stream of human life with highest regard for the values of that life.

It has been insisted from the beginning that the Christian consciousness is the only adequate interpretation of the Scriptures. By Christian consciousness is meant not the consciousness of the body of believers who are together trying to serve Christ. The interpretation of the individual becomes final only as it is accepted by the mass of the be-

lievers. Something of worth-while thought is conceived of as going out from the life of every believer. The utterance of the seer is not conceived of as complete until even he who sits in the seat of the unlearned has said "Amen." The pronouncements which do not evoke this wide human response fall by the wayside. For example, how was the canon of the New Testament shaped? Was there a determination on the part of individual leaders that such and such books should be included in the volume of Scriptures? Very likely there was at the last such deliberate selection, but before the final decision there must have been the practice of the congregations which amounted in the end to the choice or rejection of sacred books. Very likely the New Testament Scriptures were collected by a process of trying out the reading of Epistles and Gospels and exhortations before the congregations. As passages met or failed to meet the human needs, there was call for the repeated reading of some works and no call for the rereading of others. In use some documents proved their sacredness and other documents fell aside into disuse.

Before the concluding deliberate choice was this selection in use by the believers themselves; and the selection turned round the question as to whether or not the documents helped people. If each member of the body of believers is entitled to interpret biblical literature, interpretation becomes a composite and diversified activity. There is little warrant in the Scriptures for the notion that the biblical revelation is to level men to any sort of sameness. There are diversities of endowments and varieties of expression; but the united judgment of the body of believers is the supreme authority in interpreting the scriptural revelation. This is what we mean by saying that the church is to interpret the Scriptures. We mean that no matter how brilliant or interesting the utterances of any individual may be, they are not of great value until they have received in some fashion the sanction of the main mass of believers. It is the function of the spokesmen of the church to gather up into distinct expression what may have been vaguely, but nevertheless really, in the thought or half-thought of the people. Gladstone once said that it is the

business of the orator to send back upon his audience in showers what comes up to him from the audience in mist or clouds; so it is with the voice of a biblical truth through any medium of interpretation. The spokesman compresses or condenses into speech what has been dimly in the consciousness of the people. Even in days less democratic than ours this was abundantly true. It is the fashion to denounce some of the councils of the old church which shaped the creeds. It is often said that these creedal councils were moved by considerations of low-grade expediency. The councils, however, knew what the people were thinking of, and managed to get the popular thought into expression measurably satisfactory to the people themselves.

In this doctrine of the church as interpreter of scriptural truth we can be sure that the emphasis will remain on the elements which make for enlarging human life if the church keeps true to the spirit of the Bible itself. The aspirations of humanity, the longings of masses of men, find utterance in the great popular spiritual demands all the more effectively because such demands over-

ride and nullify the insistence of an individualistic point of view which might easily become selfish. We have said that this democratic interpretation is final so long as it keeps itself in line with the biblical purpose. There are some dangers, however, against which we must be on our guard. First is the danger of identifying the church with those who actually belong to an organization. When we think of the church we have in mind not merely formal organizations, but all men who are really working in the spirit of the biblical ideals. There are many persons who really act according to the biblical revelation without technically uniting with a church. It may be that such persons do not accept the intellectual puttings of biblical doctrine, but that they nevertheless live in the spirit of that doctrine. It might be conceivably possible that a church organization would stand for an interpretation of truth which would be rejected by the general good sense of a larger community. In such a case the larger community would be the interpreter. Another danger in an interpreting body is that of traditionalism. The

native conservatism of many minds stands against innovation. If, however, the innovation is in the direction of enlarging human life, it will in the end win its way. A third danger is that of institutionalism, where the organization as such becomes an end in itself without regard to the human interests involved. The Master's fiercest condemnations were for those who put any institution before the fulfillment of the human ideals. In the parable of the good Samaritan it is noteworthy that it was the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. It is hard to resist the feeling that the Master implied that the priest and Levite had been institutionalized into a lack of humanity. Making allowance now for all these dangers against which believers must guard, the chances are that interpretation of a book so human as the Scriptures is not final until it has received the real, though not necessarily formal, sanction of the body of believers.

So thoroughly does the biblical revelation turn around the supremacy of the distinctively human values that we must insist that

anything which would run counter to these values is alien to the spirit of the revelation, and, therefore, to comprehension of that revelation. We do not wish to be extreme, but it is hard to see how, in our day, for example, any who fail to put human rights in the first place can really master the scriptural revelation. We have spoken of the Master's rebukes of any form of institutionalism which stands in the way of human rights. Institutions at best are instruments; they exist merely for the purpose of bringing men to larger life; but these institutions sometimes get petrified into custom and become glorified by long practice, and even made sacred by adherents who look upon them as ends in themselves. Then there is no recourse except to break the institutions in the name of larger human life. If we could put ourselves back in the times of Jesus and feel something of the sacredness with which the Jews regarded the Sabbath, we would know the tremendous force of the Master's daring when he declared that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The Master was also insistent

upon the priority of human rights as over against property rights. It is perfectly true that Jesus did not encourage any propaganda for social reform. It is a mistake to try to read any form of modern Socialism into his teaching. Socialism is the theory of a particular time. Many of its outstanding features will no doubt one day be adopted; and the world will then move forward toward something else. Very likely three centuries from the present date the well-advanced communities of the world will be living under systems which will make Socialism itself look like the most hopeless and reactionary conservatism. The scriptural revelation, however, has not to do with the details of any particular scheme. It aims, rather, at the setting on high of the human ideal, an ideal which will, if given a chance, work itself out into the concrete forms best suited to each age, and which will not have exhausted its vitality when all that is good in the programs of our particular day shall have been incorporated into social practice.

But let us linger for a moment around the blighting effect of placing property rights in

front of human rights. If anyone at this juncture becomes nervous and insists that we are likely to introduce the new-fangled notions of the present day into a discussion where they are out of place, let us remind such a one that the danger of putting the material before the spiritual has always been the chief stumbling stone in the path of the biblical revelation. It may be too much to say with the old version that the love of money is the root of all evil, but the Scriptures place the sin of greed in the forefront among the evils that block the revealing process. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." With God a morally miraculous redemption is entirely possible; but Jesus declares that there is no need of our trying to minimize the power of the present world to blind us to visions of the spiritual world. For many forms of wrongdoing the Master had a willingness to make allowances; for the sin of placing material desires above human welfare he had unsparing condemnation. In the day of Jesus the world had an opportunity such

as it never had before confronted to learn spiritual truth. What manner of opposition was it which prevented that truth from running its full course? Largely the opposition of money interests. The Pharisees had need to keep alliance with the temporal powers. It is not without significance that Jesus was betrayed for money. It is not without significance too that Jesus's picture of the Judgment Scene concerns itself largely with the rewards for those who discharge the tasks of simple human kindness. It means much to find Jesus hinting at an unpardonable sin on the part of those who call deeds of human relief works of Beelzebub. It is certainly food for reflection that the fiercest condemnations in his parables are for those who miss the human duties in their regard for the possessions of this world. We repeat that we would not be extreme, but when we see the disregard of human life in modern industrialism; when we behold the attempts of property interests to get control of all channels for the shaping of public opinion; when we see rent, interest, and dividends more highly rated than men, women, and children, we

cannot help feeling that the deeper penetration into the Scriptures cannot arrive except through an emphasis upon fundamental human rights so mighty that all institutional creations of industrialism or ecclesiasticism shall be put into the secondary place and strictly kept there. This is not railing against wealth. It is simply calling attention to the fact that the man who possesses the wealth-tool cannot be allowed to use it or even to brandish it in such fashion as to endanger the unfolding of human ideals. It is only through the enforcing of these ideals that the Scriptures can be adequately apprehended. Until a social kingdom of God comes on earth the light of revelation cannot shine in its full brightness. Any social preacher of larger human rights is working for the dawn of a new day of biblical understanding.

Some one will ask, however, why we single out one type of evil as especially thwarting the understanding of a biblical revelation. Why not speak of the evils of appetite and of envy and jealousy? The answer is that such evils, devastating as they are toward the spir-

itual faculties, are so definitely personalized in individuals that their nature is quickly recognized. The difference is that under present organization the evils of materialism are preeminently social. There is everywhere the heartiest condemnation for the man who personally is conspicuously greedy. A social evil can manifest itself in outstanding startlingness in a single person, but the plain fact is that under modern industrial organization we are all caught in the same snare. We are all tarred with the same stick. Great as is the improvement of our present system over anything that has preceded it, nevertheless the distribution of this world's goods is so unequal that we walk in the presence of injustice on every hand. The poor man often does not receive the product of his own work. Large material prizes go to men who toil not. Now no one in particular is to blame for this social plight. Nobody has yet arisen to show us the way out. We cannot act except as we all act together; and it is doubtful even if one nation could act alone. If, however, we should all recognize the evils of the present system, if we

should condemn the wrongs of that system instead of trying to justify them, we would be on much better spiritual ground, for the attempts to justify the system lead to uneasy consciences, and to the searing of those consciences, and to the softening down of harsh truths, and finally to an inability to see things as they are. Though we have come far along the path toward industrial justice, there is still very much in the system under which we live that makes for an inability to understand some of the most elementary phrasings of Christian truth. The only way out is to see the system as it is and to take such steps forward as can be taken now. Only thus can we keep our souls saved, and only thus also can we follow the flashes from above.

Jesus preached the highest ideal for individual righteousness. Men are to strive to be perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect. But the perfection is to show itself in social impartiality in the use of material opportunities. God sendeth the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the evil and the good. How many Christians of the present day could be safely intrusted with the distribu-

tion of rainfall and sunshine? Those of us who dwell in lands that must be irrigated know that the type of Christianity that can be trusted to deal fairly with our irrigation system is somewhat unusual.

We take the injustices of the present social order too much as a matter of course. We ought to see them as making against humanity, and therefore against the scriptural revelation. When these injustices culminate in a war like the present, the only safety is thought that deals honestly with the inhumanity of the war. Granted that war in self-defense is justifiable, we keep ourselves open to divine revelations only as we refuse to glorify the inhuman. Only that nation can succeed in war and remain open to revelation from above which recognizes the inhumanity of war and refuses to glorify it.

Closely related to the blight of the spirit of this present world is the failure to perceive the need of missionary spirit for a full grasp of scriptural truth. Though the Bible was given to a peculiar people, self-centered and exclusive, it nevertheless abounds in suggestions that its content can be appreciated to

the full only by those whose sympathies run out to men at the very ends of the earth. In the eyes of the Scriptures a human being is a human being anywhere. The differences between men are as nothing compared to the likenesses. Every revelation must begin somewhere and must attack its problems in proper sequence, one after the other; but mere priority of approach does not mean that one problem is inherently more important than another. Leaders among the Jews early tried to impress this upon the Jewish mind. Considered in its historical setting, the book of Jonah is one of the most spiritually daring books ever written. Jonah stands as a type of Jew who would not admit anything of worth in human beings outside of Judaism. Rather than carry the word of the Lord to Nineveh he would leave his country and go to Tarshish; rather than turn back and resume the journey to Nineveh, he would consent to be cast overboard in a storm. Forced at last to deliver his message, he announced it with the grim satisfaction of expecting to see Nineveh destroyed. And the final text of the book is that Jonah must

learn not merely to proclaim his message to the Ninevites, but to proclaim his message with sympathy and genuine human interest. The Jews were a long time learning the lesson, but not longer than other peoples have been. Just because of the human interest involved, the missionary impulse is necessary to a spiritual seizure of the biblical revelation.

It is important that we keep the missionary motive on the right basis. It is true that the Scriptures will never be adequately appropriated until all kindreds and peoples and tongues bring their contributions. Some phases of the truth the Oriental mind must seize before the Occidental mind can be brought to appreciate them. When the final revelation comes it will be adapted to the understanding of any kindred under heaven. It is worth while to spread the Christian revelation for the sake of the return which the Christianized peoples will one day bring to our studies of the truth. But the better motive is deeper than this—the passion for human beings as human beings. Any human being is entitled to any truth

which another human being can reveal to him.

The approach must be the human approach. We must speedily get away from the Jonahlike conceptions of the biblical revelation as intended particularly for any one nation. One great danger from the present war is the loss by the religious nations involved of the ordinary New Testament point of view. Many of the fighting nations have lapsed back into the pre-Jonah era. But the present war aside, the thought of supreme truth as intended chiefly for a particular race or nation, leads to a patronizing, condescending bearing toward other peoples which thwarts the finer spiritual achievements. The contacts between the so-called higher and so-called lower nations in military, diplomatic, and commercial relations have thus far for the most part been abominable. Too often missionary effort itself has based itself on these same assumptions of racial superiority. A people may indeed receive blessings from the Scriptures in whatever spirit they are bestowed, but damage is wrought in the souls of the bestowers by the

attitude of superiority. The only genuinely biblical approach is one of respect—respect for the peoples as peoples, respect which will have regard for their growing independence in spiritual development, respect which will not force upon them particularistic interpretations of the universal Scriptures.

Now, all of this may seem like a long distance from a treatment of understanding of the Scriptures in the ordinary sense. It would not have been worth while, however, to discuss this problem merely from the point of view of exegesis or professional commentary. The essentials about the Scriptures are their relations to life, their views of human beings and teachings concerning the forces of the spiritual kingdom. We shall proceed in the other chapters to speak of God, of the revelation of God in Christ, and of the spirit of Christ as revealed in his cross. Before we enter upon that study we must again remind ourselves that only life in harmony with the point of view of the Scriptures and only an interest in the same human problems that engross the attention of spiritual writers can avail us for vital interpretation of the teach-

ings concerning the Divine, or make intelligible to us the hold of the Scriptures on the life of the world. The Bible is conceived in a spirit of respect for men. Only those who enter into that same spirit can hope to make much of the biblical revelation.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOOK OF GOD

We have remarked upon some points of view from which the student must start in order to reach a sound understanding of the Scriptures. It is time for us to ask ourselves, however, as to the dominant notes of the Scriptures which make the Book so dynamic. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the essentials of the Book are, after all, its teachings about God. The Bible is the Book of God. Due chiefly to the ideas about God are its uniqueness and its force.

Before advancing to the consideration of the Bible as a book about God it will be well for us to glance for a moment at other grounds on which supremacy for the Scriptures is sometimes claimed. There are those who maintain that the value of the Bible lies in the wealth of information which it gives us concerning the first days of the world's life. The Bible helps us to regard sympathetically the view of the universe held

by the ancient Hebrews. It is a repository of knowledge as to early science and philosophy. Now, all this is true, but relatively unimportant. Had it not been for the religious teachings of which the old-time view of the world was the vehicle, that vehicle itself would long since have been forgotten. Only archæologists are to-day greatly interested in ancient theories of the world as such.

There are, again, those who avow that the Bible deserves all praise because of the literary excellence of its style. There are, indeed, sublime passages to be forever cherished as entitled by their very sublimity of expression to permanent place in the world's literature. All this we most gladly admit. Oratory like that of the book of Isaiah, some of the sentences of the patriarchs, passages from the Psalms or from the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the thirteenth chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, are sure of permanency in literature no matter what may be anyone's opinion of their religious content. Nobility of conception is very apt to tend toward nobility of phrase. The expression may be admired for its own sake

apart from the substance; but to say that the Bible holds its throne as the Book of books simply because of the superiority of its artistic form is woefully aside from the mark. Lamentable as it may be, masses of men do not rank artistic literary skill as highly as they ought. While a lofty idea is not likely to make its full impression until wrought into lofty beauty by a master of style, the worth must nevertheless inhere in the substance rather than in the form if the statement is to make lasting effect upon the passing generations. Moreover, it is very easy to overemphasize the literary excellence of the Scriptures. There are scores of passages which, as we say, "go through one," but this marvelous effectiveness is quite as likely to be lodged in the idea itself and in the associations which that idea arouses as in the form of the passage. In some instances the literary mold in the Authorized Version is such as to hinder rather than to help; so that the prophet who seeks to add to the force of the idea breaks the mold for literary recasting.

Still another may declare that the Scriptures are valuable because they abound in

hints which make for practical success—shrewd moral maxims which aid all classes of men in avoiding pitfalls, axioms for daily conduct which ought to be accepted by everybody, even by those who care not for the religion of the Bible. All this, again, is true, but hardly sufficient to explain the grip of the Bible on mankind. So far as the more conventional morality goes, men are likely to be ruled by the sentiment of the community in which they move. They adapt themselves to the demands of the situation at a particular time rather than to a set of precepts.

Still others maintain that the human ideal itself which we sketched in a previous chapter is the determining factor in giving the Bible power. The greatest study of mankind is man. The erection of such an ideal as that of the Scriptures for man cannot fail to secure for the Book mighty power through all the ages. And yet it must be replied that if we take the Bible merely as portraying a human ideal without reference to the idea of God involved in the same process of revelation, we cut asunder two things which properly belong together. We must not forget that in

the history of Israel the prophets grasped at every new insight concerning human character as at the same time a new insight concerning the character of God. Attributing a profoundly moral trait to God made it of more consequence forthwith for man, and thus the conceptions of man and God went along together reenforcing each the other. To separate the ideal of God from the ideal of man leaves everything at loose ends for the human ideal. It is true that there are individuals here and there of intense intelligence and of immense wealth of moral endowment who do not seem to require any ideal of God to sustain and strengthen their ideal of man; but for the most of us the ideal of man cannot grow to any considerable size without growth of our notion as to the character of God. What man is now depends somewhat on our thought of where man came from, and what his place in the universe essentially is. One of our deepest yearnings is to know whether our exalted belief about man has any validity before the larger ranges of the activity of the universe itself. It is very common, for example, for those who go

forth to social tasks with a passion for humanity to lose that passion if they do not keep alive a passion for God. Disappointment with some phases of human nature itself and despair over the failures of men are apt to be so trying that the passion for humanity dies down unless familiarity with actual human life is reenforced by communion with an ideal which reaches up toward the Divine. We would ourselves insist that the loftiest human ideal in all literature is that of the Scriptures, but we must insist also that this ideal lacks driving force if it does not keep back of it the biblical doctrine of God.

From the very outset the Hebrew Scriptures deal with God. "In the beginning God," at the end God, and God at every step of the journey from the beginning to the end. There are other scriptures besides the Hebrew Scriptures that deal with God, but the kind of God set before us in the Hebrew revelation gives the Bible its supreme merit.

Since we often hear that there are other sources for the idea of God than the Scrip-

tures, it may be well for us to appraise the contributions from some of those sources before we look at the kind of God drawn for us in the biblical writings. After allowing as high excellence as is possible to the theologies obtained outside the Scriptures, the moral and spiritual superiority of the scriptural ideal shines forth unmistakably.

Many a scientist tells us that we do not further need the biblical idea of God in view of the vast suggestions concerning the Divine which science places before us. The world in which we live has broadened immeasurably since the days of the Hebrew prophets and seers. The idea of God, broadening to correspond, has to expand so overwhelmingly that we ought no longer pay heed to the imaginations of the biblical writers. Large numbers of scientists to-day avow themselves devout theists. Materialism is decidedly out of fashion, and agnosticism is less in vogue than a decade or two ago. The reverent scientist affirms that he believes in a God whose omniscience keeps track of every particle of matter in a universe whose spaces are measured by billions of miles, a God whose omni-

presence implies the interlacing of forces whose sweep and fineness seen through the telescope and microscope astonish us. Moreover, the modern doctrine of evolution shows us that the entire material system is moving on and up from lower to higher forms. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but we shall clearly be something great and glorious.

Now, far be it from us to belittle the splendor of this scientific vision. Modern scientific searchers are, indeed, finding innumerable illustrations of the greatness of God. There is every reason why the scientific investigator should rejoice in a calling which enables him to think God's thoughts after him; but when a scientist will have it that his belief in God arises only from his technical investigations, we must declare our suspicion that he is employing his findings to confirm a faith already held, though that faith may be part of his unconscious spiritual possessions. Many times the scientist is determined that the scientific discoveries shall look in theistic directions just to satisfy the imperious though unconscious demands of

his own soul. Some scientists are theists just because they are bound to be so, for the close contemplation of the entire situation in the material realm does not make for any adequate theistic verdict. It is hard indeed to believe that the nice adjustments of matter and force occur without the governance of a supervising intelligence. There are too many facts which suggest skill to make it easy to believe that the natural world is just the outcome of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. Science itself very likely establishes a presumption in favor of a governing mind, *but the deeper question is as to the character of that mind.* Is it a moral mind? At this point the hopeful evolutionist will break out that the progress is so definitely from lower to higher that no one ought to doubt the benevolence of the Power moving upward through all things. Evolution is, indeed, full of promises to one who already trusts in the goodness of God; but the progress from lower to higher is not always unmistakable. Often the survival of the fittest is just a survival of those fittest to survive, and not the survival of those

who ought to survive. There are too many things which survive which ought to be killed off. Simple good can give way to complex evil without at all violating the requirements of the evolutionistic formula. But even if we concede all that the scientist claims for his conception of God; if we grant that terms like "omnipresence" and "omniscience" and "progress" clothe themselves with new force in the Copernican and Newtonian and Darwinian terminology, we must nevertheless insist that none of this rises to the moral height of the biblical teaching. Nor are we willing to admit that the biblical doctrine is to be discounted because it grew up amid small theories of the material universe. The old Hebrew views of the physical system, outdated as they are now, are nevertheless full of sublimity on their own account. But even if they were infinitesimal as compared with the vast stretches of modern scientific measurements, the moral grandeur of the idea of God of which they were the framework stands forth unmistakably. We must not permit the quantitative bigness of modern scientific notions to ob-

scure the qualitative fineness of the biblical ideal of God.

Modern philosophy comes also and announces that it has a better God than that of the Scriptures. The most imposing modern philosophical systems are those which proclaim some form of idealism. The gist of the idealistic argument always is that the world itself is nothing apart from thought; that thought-relationships rule in and through all things; that there are no things-in-themselves; that there can be no hard-and-fast stuff standing apart from God. Things must come within the range of thought or go out of existence. There is no alternative. Now, thought implies a thinker, and this implication carries us at once to God. Here, again, we have no desire to question the cogency of the argument. We are ready to admit that this is the strongest theistic argument that has thus far been built. To be sure, there are some questions that inevitably suggest themselves: What is the thinker? Is it impersonal thought, as some have maintained? Is it just the sum of all forms of consciousness—our consciousnesses

being organs or phases of the Supreme Consciousness? Or is the thinker strictly personal, carrying on a thought-world by the power of his will and calling into existence finite thinkers in his own image? Assuming that the world is the expression of the thought of a Personal Thinker who acts in the forces of nature and creates men in his own image, the further question arises as to the character of that Thinker. While returning the heartiest thanks to the idealist for his argument—full as it is of aid for the Christian system—we have to protest that the argument does not lift us to the full height of the ideal of God inculcated in the Scriptures. And if this is true of the majestic systems of idealism, how much more is it true of the other and less convincing systems which are just now having their day! We have already spoken of pragmatism as possessing validity as a method, but pragmatism can hardly cherish pretension of being itself a system of religious philosophy.

Some very strenuous searchers after divine treasures have professed to discover value in various non-Christian religions. They have

patiently studied the great Indian world-views, for example, which are admittedly the most important religious creations outside of Christianity. These students come back to us with fragments of doctrines, gems of ethical wisdom, traces of sublimity from the Indian sacred books. It would be foolhardy not to receive any genuine treasures, no matter what the mine from which they have been quarried. We are all eager to admit the immeasurable possibilities of the Oriental type of thinking for the development of Christianity, but Oriental systems thus far have been chiefly significant as indicating what stupendous religious powers can do when they are off the track. The Indian systems of religion have run loose in India. As a result, nowhere in the world has religion been taken more seriously and more sincerely than by the Indian peoples. It is simply impossible to bring the charge against the Indian races that they have not made the most of their religion. The final indictment to be passed upon the Indian systems is that while the Indian peoples have made the most of those systems, the systems have made least of

the Indian peoples; and this because of the defects in the conception of the Divine itself. It is doubtful whether the Indian could call his highest gods personal. If he declares them personal, he can hardly make them moral in the full sense; that is to say, in the sense of exerting their force on the world in favor of justice and righteousness and love.

Now, it is just in the quality of moral force that the God of the Scriptures shows his superiority. The entire revealing process can be looked upon as one long story of the moralization of the idea of God. Let it be granted that the biblical idea was at the beginning marked by the naïve and the crude. Personally, we have never been able to see the pertinency of the reasonings which make the Hebrew Jehovah as imperfect as some students would have us believe. Nevertheless, for the sake of the argument we will admit limitations in the early Hebrew conception of God. Even with such concession, however, the outstanding characteristics of that God were from the beginning moral. Suppose that Jehovah was at the beginning just a tribal Deity. The difference between

Jehovah and other tribal deities was that the commandments which were conceived of as coming from him looked in the direction of increasing moral life for the people, and these moral demands upon the chosen people were conceived of as arising out of the nature of Jehovah himself. To be sure, the early narratives employ expressions like "the jealousy of God," but even a slightly sympathetic reading of the Scriptures indicates that the jealousy was directed against whatever would harm human life. In the mighty pictures of the patriarchs the heroes speak to their God as if the same moral obligations rested upon God as upon themselves. There is nothing finer in the Old Testament than Abraham's challenge, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

We are not specially interested in the growth of the ideas as to the power of God, though we repeat that it is difficult for us to believe that the early Hebrews thought of their Deity as so narrowly limited in power as some modern students seek to prove. The conception of the might of Jehovah grew through the centuries and followed upon the

extension of the knowledge of the Hebrews about the world in which they lived. If tomorrow morning some revolutionary astronomical discovery should convince us that the solar system is much vaster than we have ever imagined, the theist would, of course, extend the thought of the sway of God to all that solar system. If there were some method of becoming aware that the bodies of the entire astronomical system are millions of times more numerous than scientists ever have dreamed, the theist would, of course, maintain that the righteous purpose of his God reaches to all of these bodies. The growth of the Hebrew idea was somewhat parallel to this. Even when the Hebrew thought of the outside peoples as having gods of their own; he believed that as soon as his God came into conflict with the other gods, he would shatter them with his might. By the time the first chapters of Genesis were written the Hebrew conceived of God as creator of all things, and thereafter the growth of the belief in the power of God kept pace with the enlarging view of the world.

We repeat that we are not much concerned

with the growth of the idea of the power of God. We are, however, interested in the manifest teaching or direct implication of the Scriptures that from the beginning the Hebrews thought of God as under obligation to use his power for moral ends. What the moral ends were depended upon the growth of the moral ideal. At the very beginning it was believed that since God had chosen the people of Israel to be his people, he must fight their battles for them. It is from this point of view that we must deal with the early idea of God as a God of battles. God was wielding his force for a moral purpose. Moreover, if God had chosen a people to be the channel through which he was to reveal himself to the world, he must be very patient with that people. How sublime is the Old Testament belief in the patience of God toward Israel! To use the phrase of our later days, God accommodated himself to the progress which the people could make. When the prophets called upon the people to walk with God, they implied a willingness on God's part to walk with the people. If they must lengthen

their stride, he must shorten his; he must bear with them in their inadequate notions; he must judge their efforts by the direction in which they were tending rather than by any achievement in itself.

It is from the point of view of their growing apprehension of God as moral that we can best understand the ferocity of the Israelite toward the so-called heathen peoples. The boasting of the Israelites over the slaughter of outsiders must be understood from the faith in the moral destiny which the prophets conceived the God of Israel to hold in store for his people. The reason assigned for cruelties and warfares upon heathen peoples was the abominations practiced by those peoples. Of course it is possible for a student obsessed with the modern doctrine of the economic determinism of history to say that we have in the story of the Hebrew development just the play of economic forces with moral aims assigned as their formal justification. Assuming that the narratives of the conquest of Canaan are true, what the Hebrews desired—these economists tell us—was the milk and the honey. They made

their so-called advance in obedience to God an excuse for taking possession of the milk and the honey. Now, he would be blind indeed who would deny that economic values do play their part in wars of conquest; he would be foolish who would deny that wars always do justify themselves by appealing to lofty religious motives, but nevertheless the impact of the Hebrew history upon the life of the world has been a moral impact, due to the belief of the Hebrews that they were instruments in the hands of a moral God. If we could behold the abominations in heathenism upon which the old prophets looked, we would sympathize quite readily with an impulse which might seem to call for outright destruction. A friend of mine, a man of the most sensitive Christian feeling, once stood on the banks of the Ganges and watched people by the hundreds and thousands going through religious ceremonials, some of which were defiling and others silly. In the midst of the reeking vileness of one scene in particular he said that he felt for the moment an impulse like that of the old prophets to cry out for the destruction of the

entire mass. The situation seemed so dreadful and so hopeless! All this passed in an instant to the loftier feeling of compassion, but the stirring of the more primitive impulse was really moral in its foundation. In any case, the old Hebrew notion was of a God who would put a growing moral ideal in the first place.

It is not necessary for us to attempt to trace the steps of the growth of the moral ideal for God. As we have said, that ideal kept pace with the growth of the ideal for man. We must call attention, however, to the fact that the growth of the ideal was in the direction of increasing emphasis upon the responsibilities that go with power. The Hebrew may not have definitely phrased the responsibility, but he nevertheless shows his increasing realization of the obligations resting upon God. When we reach the later prophets we discern that his moral obligation upon God himself becomes more and more a determining factor. There appear glimpses of belief that God must not only fight for his people, but that he must suffer in their sufferings. It is of little consequence

for our present purpose whether the suffering servant of Jehovah of the later Israelitish Scriptures is a group of persons or an individual. The implication is that the suffering is a revelation of Jehovah himself. Moreover, there appears a widening stream of emphasis on the tenderness of God's care for his people. The Hebrew writers comparatively early broke away from the thought of God as merely philanthropically inclined toward Israel. They did not think of him as bestowing gifts which were without cost to himself. They show him as deeply involved in the life of the nation and as caring for his people with an infinite compassion. This enlarging revelation was made clear to the people through the utterances of prophets, the decrees of lawgivers, the songs of psalmists, the interpretations of historians, and the warnings of statesmen. Slowly and surely, moreover, the people attained grasp on the doctrine that the greatest revelation of God is the revelation in human character itself. They began to look forward to the coming of one who would in himself embody the noblest and best in the divine life, who

would gather up in himself all the ideals and purposes toward which the law and the prophets had looked. New Testament revelation as such we leave to the later chapters, but we have come far enough, we think, to warrant us in saying that only he can understand the Scriptures who sees that the chief fact about the Scriptures is the emphasis on the moral nature of God. Other Scriptures besides that of the Hebrews—we might say scientific, philosophical, extra-Christian Scriptures—have stood for the existence of God; but none have stood for the existence of such a God as the God of the Bible. The salient feature of the Bible is its thought of God.

CHAPTER V

THE BOOK OF CHRIST

It is of course the merest commonplace to say that the revelation of God in the Scriptures comes to its climax in Christ. The revelation in Christ gathers up all that is loftiest in the utterances of the Old Testament and gives it embodiment in a human life. It is legitimate to declare that there is little either in the teaching of Christ or in his character that is not at least foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The uniqueness of the Christ revelation consists in the manner in which the separate streams of truth of the law and the prophets and the seers and the poets are merged together in the Christ teaching, and in the fine balance with which the ideal characteristics seen from afar by the saints of the older day were realized in the living Christ. We might justly say that a devout reader of the Old Testament could find rich elements of the Christ revelation even if he should never see a page of the New

Testament. The virtue of the New Testament, however, is that all the elements revealed throughout the course of the historic periods of Israel's career are bound together in the life and character of Christ. It is no mere epigram to say that if the greatest fact about the Scriptures is God, the greatest fact about God is Christ. Any thorough study of the Scriptures must revolve around Christ as its center. If the Scriptures mean anything, they mean that in Christ we see God. Of course it is open to the skeptic to reply that in all this the Scriptures are completely mistaken; but he cannot maintain that this is not what the Scriptures mean. The Book comes to its climax with an honest conviction that Christ is the consummate revelation of God. The day when men could charge any sort of manipulation of the material by Scripture writers for unworthy doctrinal purposes is past. We have in another connection said that each of the New Testament books was, indeed, written with a definite aim, but this does not mean that facts and teachings were twisted out of their legitimate significance. That Christ is the supreme gift

of God to men is so thoroughly built into the biblical revelation that there is no digging that idea out without wrecking the entire revelation itself. To maintain anything else would be to do violence to the entire scriptural teaching. The burden of the entire New Testament is that God is like Christ.

This may seem to some to be a reversal of present-day approach to the study of the Christ. We may appear to be attacking the problem from the divine angle rather than from the human. Why not ask what Christ was rather than what God is? It is indeed far from our purpose to minimize the rich significance of the humanity of Jesus, but we are trying now to get the scriptural focus. We do not believe that we can secure that focus by looking upon the character of Christ as a merely human ideal. The might of the scriptural emphasis is that Christ is the revelation of God. We are well aware that ordinary theological debate has centered on the question as to the extent to which Christ is like God. The Bible is colored with the belief that God is like Christ. This may seem at first glimpse to be a very fine dis-

crimination, but the importance of that discrimination appears when we reflect that mankind is more eager to learn the character of God than to learn how far a man can climb toward divinity. In all such discussions as this we proceed at peril of being misunderstood, but we must repeatedly affirm that important as is the problem as to the human ideal set forth in Christ, the divine ideal set forth in him is more significant as explaining the hold of the Bible on men.

Is it not sufficient for us to behold a lofty human ideal in the portrait of Christ without such emphasis on this ideal as also a revelation of the divine character? The answer depends upon what we are most interested in. If we care most for a perfect and symmetrical human life, we reply that we find that perfection and symmetry in Christ. In our second chapter we laid such stress upon the importance of the enlarging human ideal that we have committed ourselves to the importance of the Christ ideal as a revelation of the possibilities of human life. But if we take that ideal in itself without any reference to the character of God, how much en-

largement does it bring us? As members of the human race we can indeed be proud that a human being has climbed to such moral stature as did Jesus, but what promise does that give that any other human being can attain to his stature? As a member of the human race I can be profoundly thankful for a philosopher like Kant. I can, indeed, dedicate myself to the study of the Kantian philosophy with some hope of mastering it. I can seek to reproduce in my life all the conditions that surrounded the life of the great metaphysician, but I cannot hope to make myself a Kant. Strive as I may, such transformation is out of the question. I may attain great merit by my struggle, but I cannot make myself a Kant. The more intensely I might struggle, the more convinced I would become of the futility of my quest, and the genius of the philosopher might tower up at the end as itself a grim mockery of my ambition. So it is with the Christ if he is not a revelation of the God life at the same time that he is an idealization of the human life. Viewed as a revelation of God's character the Christ life is the hope of all the ages. Viewed

only as a masterpiece of human life it might well be the despair of mankind.

Of course there are those who believe that it is impossible for Christ to be a revelation of the human without also being a revelation of the Divine. We have no desire to quarrel with this position, though we find it more optimistic than convincing. Incredible as it may seem at first thought, the universe might theoretically be regarded as a system ruled over by a Deity who had brought forth a character like that of Christ just for the sake of seeing what he could achieve in the way of a masterpiece, without being himself fundamentally involved in self-revelation. Christ might conceivably be a sort of poetic dream of the Almighty rather than a laying bare of the Almighty's own life. We find that human authors by an effort of great imagination fashion creations in a sense completely different from themselves. It might be theoretically urged that the character of Christ is different from the character of God. If this seems very far-fetched, let us remind ourselves then that there are those in the present world who conceive of Christ as the

very highest peak of human existence and yet deny that he has any sort of significance as a revelation of the forces back of the world. Such thinkers maintain that Christ is the best the race has to show, and yet affirm that the race is but an insignificant item in the total massiveness of the universe. The Bible establishes the faith of men against skepticism like this by making the Christ-ideal for God himself so attractive and appealing.

There are those who proclaim that we do not need any revelations of God to make the human ideal fully significant—the human ideal stands by itself. Some such thinkers go consistently the full length of saying that they are willing to keep their eyes open to the hopelessness of the universe. They can see nothing beyond this life but total oblivion. Nevertheless, with their eyes open they will fight on manfully to the end and take the final leap into the dark without flinching. They are very apt to add that their philosophy is the only unselfish one; that the desire of men for any sort of help from conceptions about the Divine is selfishness where it is not

sentimentalism. It is fair to say that such doctrines seldom meet large response. The reason is not that men selfishly seek out a God for the sake of material reward that may come to them, but that they seek him for the sake of finding a resting place for their minds and souls, for the sake of cherishing an end which seems in itself worth while, for the sake of laying hold on a universe in which they can feel at home. If this is selfishness, then the activities of the human soul in its highest ranges are selfish. If it is selfish to long for a universe in which the heart can trust, it is selfish also to enjoy the self-satisfaction with which some of these thinkers profess to be ready to take their leap into the night.

As we scan the history of Christianity since the day of the Founder we are impressed that religious organizations as such which arise within Christianity tend to survive in proportion as they make central the significance of Christ as the revealer of the character of God. We would not for a moment underestimate the importance of those groups of Christians who take Christ merely as a prophet who lived the noblest life and ex-

alted his truth by the noblest death. Many such believers manifest the very purest devotion to Christ. They are his disciples. But the historic fact is that organizations founded on such doctrines alone do not win sweeping triumphs. On their own statement the most they hope to do is to spread the leaven of their doctrine into the thinking of other groups of Christians. Their service in this respect is not to be disparaged, for at all times the more orthodox opinion of Christ, so called, needs the leavening of emphasis on the humanity of Christ. But after all these allowances it is just to affirm that theology which sees only the human in Christ does not come to vast power, and that clearly because the world is chiefly interested in the question with which the entire biblical revealing movement deals, namely, what is the nature of God? With that question answered we can best understand the nature of man and the possibility of communion between man and God.

We may be permitted to pick up the thread of the argument in the last chapter and ask again what moral purposes rule the

forces of this world. It must indeed be an odd type of mind that does not at least occasionally ask what this world is for, and what all this cosmic commotion is about. It is well for all of us to do the best we can without asking too many hard questions, but the queries will at times come up and with the normal human being they are not likely easily to down. We are in the midst of powers which defy our intellects. We do not go far in the attempt to read the secrets of nature around us without discovering that all we can hope to spell out is the stages by which things come to pass, and the mechanisms by which they fit themselves together. Why they come to pass is beyond us, except in a most limited sense. The purposes for which events occur in this world are not self-evidently clear. Explanations of purposes only make matters worse; and at any moment this problem of the mystery of the universe may take personal significance in the form of a blow upon the individual which seems to mock all hope of anything worth while in human life. There is nothing more futile than the attempts even of ministers to

divine the meanings of afflictions or of those inequalities of lot which attend the natural order. The preachers can encourage us to make the most of a bad lot, but their guesses as to why these things are ordinarily add to our burdens. No, the mind of itself just by contemplation of the things as they are cannot find much light. This enigma has always been before the philosophers in the form of the question as to physical suffering. A number of plausible answers have been made as to the reasons for pain in the present order. Leibnitz said that even the Almighty creating the finite world had to adjust himself to some limitations for the good of the whole; that if some forces are to run in one direction, there must be mutual concession and compromise in the adjustment of manifold other activities; and that all this involves at least apparent stress and injustice at particular points. This sounds well enough, but why the afflictions of the individual who happens to be one of the particular points should be just what they are is a mystery. The upshot is that the ordinary man—the plain man, as we call him—must

either give up the whole problem by seeking to forget it, or must rebel against it, or he must find relief in a God whom he can trust without being able to fathom his plans.

The tragedy of physical affliction is light as compared to the tragedies which arise in any conscience which seeks to take moral duties seriously. To be sure, we live at present in a rather complacent age so far as the struggles of conscience are concerned. The advice of the world is to do the best we can and let the rest go. We are not to take ourselves too seriously. But the long moral advances of the race have come through those who have taken the voices of conscience seriously. Now, what can a sensitive conscience make of moral duty? Assume that we have before us the exalted Christ ideal, and accept this as the guide of our lives—assume that we even have hope of some day attaining to that ideal—the distracting question is bound to jump at us: Are we doing enough? Have we sacrificed enough for those in worse plight than ourselves? And what about our past mistakes? Shall we go back and try to undo these? At the very best that might be like

unraveling through the night what we have spun through the day. It will not do to dismiss this as unhealthiness or morbidness of mind. William James has shown pretty conclusively that the so-called normal or healthy-minded moral life is apt to be shallow. The great moral tragedy of the race is the distance between the ideal and any possible attainment. We can console ourselves by saying that noble discontent is the glory of man; but that does not get us far. There is only one way out, and that is to trust that we are dealing with a Christlike God, that his attitude toward us is the attitude of Jesus toward men. It is impossible to feel that in discipleship with Jesus men were complacent about their own moral perfections on the one hand, or harassed with self-reproaches on the other. They were advancing toward the realization of an ideal in companionship with One who not only in himself realized the human ideal, but who taught them that all the forces of the world would work together with them in their climb toward perfection, and that God would be patient with their blunders.

The question as to the character of God becomes more vital the longer we reflect. The growing conscience of our time demands that two conceptions be kept together—that of power and that of moral responsibility. We cannot hold a person responsible unless he has power; we cannot give a person power unless he is willing to act under responsibility. This realization is fast modifying all our relations to politics, to finance, to industry, even to private duties. We are swiftly moving toward the day when society will insist that any measure of power which has an outreach beyond the circle of the holder's personal affairs shall be acquiesced in by society only on condition that the holder of that power be willing definitely to assume responsibility to society. What we demand of men we demand also of God, and we have the scriptural warrant for believing that these human demands are themselves hints concerning the nature of God. Now, no one doubts the power of God. All scientific and philosophic trends are toward the centralization of power in some unitary source. All our study of nature and of society convinces

us that there is a unity of power somewhere. If this be true, there must be raised with increasing persistence the question as to whether the World-Power is acting under a sense of moral responsibility. There were days when this problem was not raised as it is now. Men assumed for centuries that the king could do no wrong; that he could order his people about in the most arbitrary fashion. In our own time we have seen advocacy of the doctrine that the man of wealth is a law unto himself in the handling of the power that comes with wealth. Such mistakes never were really a part of the biblical idea. In shaping the threefold notion of priest and prophet and king to make the people familiar with the functions of God-sent leadership the strokes of emphasis always fell on the responsibility of the prophet to proclaim his message at whatever cost to himself, of the priest to keep in mind the sacredness of his office, and of the king to rule in righteousness. These demands were inevitably carried up to God: and in Christ the supreme effort is made to convince us that we can trust in the God of Christ,

though we may not be able to understand him. This is not the place for an attempt at determining the essentials of the Christ career. Some features of that life, however, as illustrating responsibility in the use of power can be hinted at here. Take the story of the temptation. We are not concerned now with the historic form in which the temptation occurred. After the historians have made all the changes in the drapery of the story they choose, the fact remains that the temptation narrative deals with the essential problems of any leader confronted with a task like that of Christ. The Messianic consciousness was a consciousness of power. How should the power be used? Should it be used to minister to human needs like those of hunger? That would promise a quick solution of a sort. The peoples would eagerly rally around the new deliverer. Should there be an attempt to utilize the political machinery of the time? There could be no doubt of the effectiveness of this plan. Should the exalted lofty spiritual state of the Master be relied upon to carry him through spectacular displays of extraordinary might

that would capture the popular mind? Each of these suggestions presented its advantages. Each might have been rightfully followed by some one with less power than Jesus had; but for him any one of them would have involved a misuse of power, and hence he cast them all aside.

The miracles reported of Christ have this for their peculiarity, that they show a power conceived of as divine used for a righteous purpose. It is significant that practically all the miracles described are those of healing or of relief. The kind of miracle that an irresponsible leader would have wrought is suggested by the advice of James and John to Jesus to call down fire on an inhospitable Samaritan village. The reported reply of Jesus, "Ye know not what spirit you are of," is the final comment on such use of power. Now, after we have made the most of the miracles recorded of Jesus, after we have made them seem just as extraordinary in themselves as possible, their most extraordinary feature is this use to which the power was put; and on the other hand, if we strip the miracles of everything that suggests

breach of natural law and make them just revelations of super-normal control over nature through laws like those whose existence and significance we are beginning to glimpse to-day, still we cannot empty these narratives of their significance as revealing a morally responsible use of force. Let us be just as orthodox as we can, the purpose of the use of the forces is the supreme miracle; let us be just as destructively radical as we please, we cannot eliminate from the Scriptures this impression of Christ as one who used power with a sense of responsibility. This revelation is one which the ages have always desired.

We must be careful to keep in mind the connection of the Christ life with what came before it and what has proceeded from it. Here we have the advantage which comes of regarding the Bible as the result of a process running through the centuries. If the Bible were not a library, but only a single book, written at a particular time, we might well be attracted by the nobility of its teachings, but might despair of ever making the teachings effective. There is no proving in syllogistic

fashion that Jesus was what he claimed to be, or that he was what his disciples thought of him as being; but when we see a massive revealing movement centering on the idea of God as revealed in Christ, when we see the acceptance of the spirit of Christ opening the path to communion with the Divine, and when we find increasing hosts of persons finding larger life in that approach to the Divine, we begin to discern the vast significance of the scriptural doctrine that in Christ we have the revelation of the Christlike God.

In this discussion we have been careful to avoid the terms of formal and creedal orthodoxy. This is not because the present writer is out of sympathy with these terms, but because he is trying to keep to the main impression produced by the New Testament. The fundamental scriptural fact is that in Jesus the early believers saw God; they came to rest in God as revealed in Christ. This is true of the picture of Christ in the earliest New Testament writings. Modern scholarship has not been able to find any documents of a time when the disciples did not think of Jesus as the revealer of God. If the disciples

had not thought of Jesus thus, they would have found little reason to write of him. Now the scriptural authors employ various terms to declare the unique intimacy of Christ with God. In these expositions Jewish and Greek and even Roman thought terms play their part. Passages like the opening sentences of the fourth Gospel, or like the great chapter in the Philippians, are always profoundly satisfying and suggestive in their interpretation of the fundamental fact, but that fundamental fact itself is the all-essential—that in Christ the New Testament writers thought of themselves as having seen God, and as having gazed into the very depths of the spirit of the Father in heaven. Believing as we do, moreover, in the helpfulness of the creedal statements of the church, we must nevertheless avow that such statements are secondary to the impression made upon the biblical writers by actual contact with the Christ. We must not lose sight of the primacy of that impression as we study our Scriptures. We must not limit the glory of the impression itself by the limitations of some of the explanations which we

undertake. Much harm has been done the understanding the Scriptures by speaking as if some of our creedal statements concerning Christ are themselves Scriptures! The scriptural Christ is greater than any creedal characterization of Christ thus far undertaken.

Of recent years an attempt has been made to prove that no such person as Jesus ever existed. The attempt has proved futile, but it has had a significance altogether different from what the propounders of the theory intended. The original aim was to show the contradictions of the testimony concerning Jesus and the inadequacies of the testimony to his existence as an historical Person. The result has been to show that the real significance of the Christ life is not to be found in any particular utterance, or in any specific deed, but in the total impact that he made upon the consciousness of man as suggesting the immediate presence of the Divine. The quality of the Christ life satisfies us in the inner depths as bearing witness to the quality of the God life. We have no sympathy with the views of the critics just mentioned; but

we must say that no matter how the thought of God in Christ got abroad, no matter how mistaken our thought of the historical facts at the beginning of the Christian era, the belief in the Christlike God nevertheless did get abroad. There is no effacing that conception from the New Testament. No matter what detailed changes in the narrative itself radical criticism may think itself capable of making, the door was opened wide enough in the Christ for the divine light to stream through. We said in the last chapter that the most important feature of the biblical revelation is God himself. We must now say that the supreme fact about God is Christ.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOOK OF THE CROSS

If the central feature of the Scriptures is their idea of God, and if the climax of the biblical revelation is Christ, the greatest fact about Christ from the point of view of the Bible is his cross. We say *fact* advisedly, for we are not dealing with the theories that have sprung up to interpret the meaning of the cross. We are trying to deal solely with the direct impressions which seem to have been made upon the scriptural writers as to the place of the cross in the revealing movement.

We said in the last chapter that the Scriptures reach their climax in the doctrine that God is in Christ. The cross of Christ carries to most effective revelation the Christlike character of God. While we are not treating now the various creedal dogmas as to the person of Christ, we must not forget that those dogmas have essayed as part of their task the bringing of God close to men. The truth embodied in the text that the Lamb

was slain from the foundation of the world is essential to knowing the Scriptures. We have seen that even as a warrior Jehovah was thought of as willing to bear his part of the burdens of the chosen people. We have seen growing the idea that Jehovah was under moral obligation to carry through the uplifting work which he had begun. We have seen prophets attain to glimpses of the meaning of suffering for the divine life, and we have beheld the culmination in the suffering of Christ. In those perplexing phrases of the creeds like, "Very God of very God," the aim of the church has been perfectly clear—to guard the scriptural idea that God was so truly in Christ that the sufferings of Christ were the sufferings of God. Even when least intelligible the pain of men becomes more easily borne if men can believe that in some real sense their pain is also the pain of God. That God is Christlike in capacity to suffer is in itself a revelation of no small consequence.

In the cross of Christ we see exalted with surpassing power the belief that God acts out of righteousness in his relation to the uni-

verse and to men. It must needs be that Christ suffer. The writers seem unable to escape the conviction that they are beholding the working of divinely inevitable moral necessities. These moral obligations are not to be conceived of as external to God or imposed on him from outside of himself. In the Scriptures they seem, rather, to be expressions of his own nature. When the writers of theories about the cross lay stress on those profound obligations of God toward moral law which must be discharged in the work of redemption, the Scriptural basis underneath such theories is the implication that God, by the very fact of what he is, must act righteously. His power is not his own in such sense that he can act from arbitrary or self-centered motives. The Judge of all the earth must do right, at whatever cost to himself. The Scriptures keep close to the thought of God as a supremely powerful Being under supreme responsibility in the use of his power. If we can believe the Scripture that in Christ we see God, and that the bearing of Christ during his suffering reveals really and uniquely the bearing

of God himself, we have a revelation of the grasp with which moral responsibility holds the Almighty against even any momentary slip into arbitrariness. Sometimes we hear the sufferings of Christ preached as a pattern of nonresistance for men. It is permissible thus to interpret the cross within limitations; but this is not the essential aspect of the cross, as explaining its hold on men. The all-important doctrine as to the use of power is hinted at in the Master's word that he had but to call for legions of angels if he so chose. Under most extreme provocation the forces of the Almighty held to their appointed task. If the Almighty had been conceived of as a Despot or an Egotist, he would have been expected to resort at once to revengeful violence in the presence of such insults as those of the persecutors of the Son of God. The Source of all activity can hardly be conceived of as passive; but the passivity of the Christ of the cross suggests that no outrage by men can divert the almighty power from its moral purpose. This is really a gathering together and lifting on high of the doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount, that God maketh the

sun to shine upon the just and the unjust, and causeth his rain to fall on the evil and the good. That is to say, while the Bible thinks of the cross as laying bare the Almighty's reaction against evil, it also thinks of that cross as showing a God who will not be disturbed by any merely "personal" considerations. We behold the Almighty's use of power for the advance of a moral kingdom. The Almighty is set before us as exerting all his power for the relief of men. The cross makes the profoundest revelation of the moral fixedness and self-control of God so long as we hold to the scriptural representation. It is to be regretted that many theological theories break away from the Scripture basis and build upon assumptions which are artificial, not to say unmoral: or, rather, in their striving after system they get away from the atmosphere of moral suggestiveness with which the Gospels and Epistles surround the cross.

That God will do his part in the redemption of men is set before us in the cross. That part can be nothing short of making men yearn to be like Christ and of aiding

them in their struggle for the Christlike character. It will be remembered that in the last chapter we called attention to the hopelessness of the Christian ideal viewed as an ideal in itself without a dynamic to help men to realize the ideal. If Christ is only to reveal to us the character toward which men are to strive, we are in despair. That one man has reached such perfection is in itself no promise that other men may reach that perfection. Moreover, the excellence of Christ is not only a moral excellence; or if it is moral excellence, that excellence involves a balance of intellectual attributes which is for us practically out of reach. Now, Christ is the ideal, but the ideal is one toward which we not only labor in our own strength, but one whose attainment by us is an object of solicitude for God himself. And so we see in the cross a patience which will bear with men to the utmost, and which will reenforce them as they press toward the goal. The glory of Christianity is largely in the paradox that it sets before men an unattainable ideal and then commands them to attain the ideal. If the cross is nothing but a revelation of an ideal

for men, this paradox is insoluble and intolerable. In the scriptural light of the cross, however, we catch the glory not of an abstract ideal, but of a Father's love for his children—not of the commands of conscience in the abstract, but of the desires of a personal Friend who will lift men as they stumble and fall. The ground for this patience seems as we read to be in the very nature of God himself. God has brought men into this world without consulting them, he has dowered them with the terrific boon of freedom, he has set them in hard places; but he has done this out of a moral and loving purpose. He therefore makes more allowances for men than exacting men ever can make for themselves. He puts at the service of men so much of his power as they can appropriate by their moral effort. The Christ of the cross is taught as the truth about God—the God who is at once the supremely real and the supremely ideal places his powers at the service of men who would make their Christ-ideal progressively real in themselves.

The power of the Bible over men centers

around the teaching that the cross not only reveals God as morally bound to redeem men, but that it also shows us the divine aim in redemption. Men are to be redeemed by seeking for forgiveness in the name of the moral life set on high by the cross, but the repentant soul is to show its sincerity by devotion to the task and spirit of cross-bearing. The aim of the cross is to bring men together into a fellowship of the cross, in a fellowship of suffering for the sake of the moral triumph to be won at the end. We are accustomed to think of suffering as implying the possibility of joy. The man who can feel keen sorrow can feel keen joy; they who have the power to weep have also the power to laugh. In the final kingdom the weeping shall be turned into joy. But, according to the Scriptures, it is not necessary for the disciples to wait until the consummation before entering into the joy of their Lord. There is an entrance to the divine mind through bearing the cross. Those who desired to learn of Christ as true disciples were expected to take up the cross and carry it daily. The Master also declared

that the disciples were to think of themselves as blessed when they endured persecution for righteousness' sake, for men had persecuted the prophets in all ages. The implication is that knowledge of and sympathy with the prophets came out of cross-bearing like that of the prophets. To use a simple illustration: a student of the careers of the leaders of any reform might gather a mass of information about the reformers in an outside kind of fashion, as by the study of books, or by visits to the scenes of their struggles. Such a student, however, could not master the inner spirit of a reformer's life until he himself had battled for some cause at risk to himself. So the man who seeks to bear the cross of Christ is on the path to sympathetic inner knowledge of the spirit of Christ. In our second chapter we called attention to the truth that approach to knowledge of God is through the doing of the will of God. Doing of the will, according to Jesus, means much more than just a round of good deeds. It means carrying the burdens which are inevitable in cross-bearing. There is good reason for believing that the very highest step in

spiritual learning is taken only through the willingness to bear the cross. In our modern educational systems we lay varying degrees of stress upon the importance of different methods of acquiring knowledge. There is at the bottom of the scale the method of mastering the instruction of the teacher by attention and reflection. There is, next, the method of learning through one's own experiment—through using microscope or telescope or textbook for oneself. There are, further, the social aids to the quickening of the mind as groups of students study and discuss together. But the deepest knowledge comes as the student feels his sympathy and feeling involved. If he must pay himself out for the acquisition of the truth, or if he must defend his conclusions at great cost to himself, this experience which involves the feeling involves also the sharpening of the intellect. The eyes of the soul are opened to the subtler intuitions. Thus it is in the revelations of the divine purpose in the Scriptures. It is hard to make out how anybody can hope to master a revelation of a cross-bearing God without himself being a cross-bearer.

In the New Testament narratives of Passion Week the Master is reported as winning his surest convictions of the presence of God and of the victory of his truth at the very instant when he entered into the extreme depths of suffering. In the after days it was when the saints faced stoning that they saw the heavens opening; it was the apostle who had suffered hardships almost too numerous to mention who got the most positive conviction of the reward which awaited him. In the school of Christ the very heaviest stress must fall upon the indispensability of cross-bearing as a means to understanding.

Not only does the biblical revelation see in the cross of Christ the culminating manifestation of the character of God, and of the purpose of God in redemption, but it also shows to us the divine method in helping men. We have spoken of those who dwell upon the Master's nonresistance as a model of passivity in the presence of evil. The example of Christ when thus treated is in danger of being misinterpreted. The Christ of the cross was passive so far as physical force was concerned; but he was never more

intensely active in the higher ranges of his faculties—in self-control and in alertness to the finer whisperings of the spirit. The Christ's non-resistance to the physical might of evil is not to be interpreted as acquiescence on the part of the Divine toward the ravages of evil, but, rather, as the divine method of thwarting evil by allowing it to reveal itself. No amount of preaching about the nature of evil can equal in eloquence the self-revelations of that nature as it works itself out into expression. While in a degree the self-revelation of evil put forth against Christ was unique, yet we must remember that the sins which put Christ to death are just those commonest in all time. Judas was disappointed. He carried spite no more tenaciously than the ordinary heart is capable of treasuring it. Caiaphas desired simply to hold his own position and preserve the peace of his nation. Very likely the type of opinion in the midst of which Caiaphas moved would have pronounced that he rendered a disagreeable, but nevertheless necessary patriotic service in his condemnation of Christ. Pilate too meant well, but was afraid of the

crowd. His friends may have commended his administrative wisdom in allowing the people to have their own way. It was the play of just such ordinary forces of sin against an extraordinary holiness that made it impossible for the mightiest revelation ever vouchsafed to man to work through the earthly activity of Jesus for more than a few months. The Scripture does not have much to do with abstract sins; with concrete sins of men as we actually find them, it has much to do.

The Scriptures make it very clear that there is something which satisfies God himself in the work of redemption. God acts out of moral obligation, out of self-respect, out of love. But he acts always in respect for men as free moral beings. The cross appeals to the free spirit of men to behold the nature of evil, and to flee from that evil toward their redeeming God. If the redemption is to be a moral redemption, the last detail of the method must be moral. The power of the Almighty must not be used to break down freedom of men. It would be theoretically possible for an almighty power to bring to

bear such pressures upon human wills as to crush them, but the strongest representation of the power of God in the New Testament does not go to the length of hinting at interference with the freedom of men. Men are to be saved as free men or not at all. We might conceivably imagine the Almighty as granting such indubitable vision of the material rewards of righteousness and the material loss of unrighteousness as would irresistibly draw masses of a certain grade of men into the Kingdom without a morally free consent to righteousness. Or we might conceive of the Almighty as so weighing this or that factor of environment as to diminish almost to the vanishing point the free choice of men. This kind of compulsion would not be moral. The only compulsions of the cross are those of a moral God splendidly attractive on his own account.

It will have occurred to some readers by this time that we have said very little about the love of God in our discussion of the Scriptures, whereas that love is the outstanding feature of the biblical revelation. Our reply is that we have been trying to be true to

the impression made by the Scriptures as to the kind of love which we must think of as expressing the deepest fact in God's life. We would not in the least minimize the truth that love is the last word of the scriptural revelation; but in our modern life we are apt to get away from the quality of the love revealed in the Bible. The love of the cross is built upon the righteousness which runs through the Sacred Book from the beginning to the end. A god of indifferent moral quality might love. The old Greek gods had favorites upon whom they lavished their affections. A god might be conceived of as an amiable and well-wishing father, foolishly indulgent toward his children. The love of the New Testament, however, is the love of a Father who dares to appeal to the children to make heroic response; and who shows his own love for them in the lengths to which he will go for them. Moral love will go the full length of heroic self-sacrifice. We cannot help believing that it is the quality of God's love, rather than the mere fact of that love, which is the explanation of the power of the biblical teaching.

A friend of mine many years ago wrote a book which he called The Hero God. The publishers objected to the title because they saw in it a touch of sensationalism. No title, however, could have more adequately set forth the biblical God. God is the hero of the Bible. His heroism appears in growing revelation from the beginning. It shows itself superbly in his willingness to bear the burdens of mankind and in the appeals which he makes for response from men. The picture is of a God who dares to believe in men and who dares to call on them for the extremes of self-sacrificing devotion, not to himself as an arbitrary Person, but to himself as the center of the moral life which is above all other life worth while. It is open to anyone to object that this biblical picture does not necessarily hold good for God; but it is hardly possible to object that the picture is not biblical. The picture stands in its own right and makes its own appeal. The only way to test it in life is to yield to its appeal.

If we are asked to account for the power of the Bible, we are at a loss for any one

single statement. The most compendious reply is the magnetism of the love of God as revealed in Christ. This is so broad, however, that it may not make a direct and vivid impression. We may say, then, that one element of the magnetism of the biblical revelation is the magnetism of the appeal to the heroic. Whatever else the Bible may or may not be, it is not a book of soft and easy things. Breaths of the most rigorous life blow across every page. It is made for man in that it calls men to the service of the highest and best. The religious systems which make the fewest and least demands upon their followers most speedily fall away; those that call for the utmost are most likely to meet the enthusiastic response. There is a frank honesty about the biblical appeal which holds a charm for all men in whom there are any sparks of real manhood. The severities of the Christian life are nowhere disguised. Men are never lured on by false pretenses. The path is the path of cross-bearing, and the reward is the comradeship between God and man as they together work toward the highest goal, a comradeship which

of itself brings relief to men burdened with the mystery of the universe and agonized by remorse over sin.

This essay is quite as significant for what it has not said as for what it has said. In our omissions we have tried to keep clear the main outlines of scriptural revelation. We have sought to hold fast to principles rather than to discuss details. We have done this because we have believed that there is more value for religious understanding in pointing out the loftier biblical peaks which give the direction of the whole range than in tracing out pathways through detailed passages. Moreover, we have been afraid to employ many theoretical terms lest we blur the quick moral impressions made by the Scripture phrasings. For example, it may be objected that our treatment of the character of God is altogether inadequate. We have not thus far said a word about the Trinity, for example, or about atonement. The reason is that we believe that any theories about God must base themselves upon the moral suggestions of the Scriptures; and our business is with these rather than with the theories.

The received revelation concerning God would warrant us in fashioning any theory as to the richness of his inner constitution which might even measurably satisfy our minds. The scriptural atmosphere as to the moral life in God must, however, be kept in the chief place in all of our theological theories. Atonement must be interpreted chiefly in terms of ethical steadiness if it is to build on a biblical foundation. But the instant we use formal terms like "Trinity" and "atonement" we have taken at least one step away from the Scriptures. Again, we have said nothing about Divine Providence. The Bible is full of instances of providences, but here also we have preferred to let the fundamental moral character of the biblical God speak for itself. We may have our own belief that there is no scriptural warrant for that separation which obtains in much theology between the processes of God and the processes of nature. We may admit that the Hebrew had no very systematically framed theory of the processes of nature, but he deemed God to be in such close touch with nature as easily to control its forces for a

good end. In two accounts of the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites we have an apparent contradiction which is at bottom not a contradiction. In one account God seems to cause the waters to wall up on both sides of the Israelites in defiance of the laws of nature. In another God accomplishes the drying of the path through the blowing of a strong east wind. The Hebrew would not have troubled himself much with the apparent contradiction, for he would have conceived of God as the chief factor in either event, and of his purpose as having the right of way. There is thus no great value in discussing specific instances as long as the care of God for his children is the animating purpose of the entire biblical content. So with answers to prayer—the God who is willing to go for men to the lengths revealed in the cross will surely answer any prayer worth answering. The essential is to lift prayer up into harmony with the entire revealing and redeeming movement, and to conceive of it as a fitting of the whole life into the purposes of a moral God. Certain general requirements would always have to be met. Prayer

would have really to deal with what is best for the individual, best for those around him, and most in harmony with the character of God himself. So, again, with the progress of the kingdom of God on earth—the God of whose nature the cross is the final revelation can be trusted to do the best possible for the Kingdom here and now. Much debate about the second coming of Christ misses the great moral principles which are the heart of the Christian revelation and loses itself in the incidental forms in which those principles were declared. The best preparation for the coming of the kingdom of Christ is absorption in the principles of Christ and in the spirit of Christ. To get away from these in our search for external and material conditions which are the mere vehicle of the biblical thought is not only to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp, but to injure true spiritual progress. Jesus has given us the spiritual principles which must control the destiny of any society here and now. In the light of the Christ-faith revealed in the cross we must not despair of the redemption of men by the cityfull and by the nationfull,

for the greatest confidence ever placed in men is the implied trust of the cross of Christ. The Almighty at the beginning paid an immense tribute to the human race when he flung it out into the gale of this existence. In the light of the cross we cannot believe that He expected the race to sink. In the cross the Christ who revealed God's own mind showed the length he was willing to go in confidence that men would finally turn to him with all the powers of their lives. To throw up our hands and say that the world is getting worse and we can do nothing without a speedy physical return of the Christ is to overlook the spiritual forces of the cross.

We have said nothing about immortality. What the Scriptures themselves say is largely incidental. The Master did not allow himself to be drawn into any extended conversation about the details of a future life, but he did give us the God of the cross. In the presence of that cross we can profess the utmost confidence in the eternal life of the sons of God, while at the same time acknowledging the utmost ignorance as to any of the material conditions of the future life. It is

commonly assumed that the resurrection of Christ proves that we shall likewise rise, but the rising of Christ does not of itself prove that others shall rise. The cross, however—showing the extent to which the Divine is willing to go for men—is the ground of our hope. God will not leave his loved ones to see corruption. In a word, the cross of Christ gathers up all the biblical truth. It is a revelation of God's own character, of his hope for men, of the methods by which he seeks to win men, and of the ground of our faith in a right outcome for men and for society.

We may be permitted to summarize by saying that scientific and historical biblical study is a preparation for the knowledge of the Scriptures; that it is exceedingly important that the student approach with the correct preliminary point of view. The revelation of the inner significance, however, does not dawn until there is recognition of the need of obedience to the principles laid down in the Scriptures. And this obedience must be broad enough to include zeal for the uplift of our fellow men in all phases of their lives.

Out of righteous living the devoted life, we believe, will see that the greatest fact of the Bible is God; that the greatest fact of God is Christ; that the greatest fact of Christ is the cross.

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